CHAPTER 2

ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarizes and compares the management alternatives that were developed as potential management strategies for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. It explains the alternative development process, provides reasons why some of these alternatives were later eliminated from detailed study, describes the alternatives that are considered in detail, and lastly, compares how the alternatives respond to the significant issues identified in Chapter 1.

CONSISTENCY ACROSS FORESTS/STATE LINES

In an effort to have a consistent approach to the development of revised forest plans across the Southern Appalachian forests, various teams were assembled and assigned specific responsibilities. In addition to the individual Forest Interdisciplinary Teams (IDTs), the following teams comprised of individuals from the five forests worked on coordinating, developing and analyzing the forest plan alternatives:

- The Steering Team was comprised of the Forest Supervisors of the five national forests and the Director of Planning. They provided oversight and direction to the overall planning effort.
- The SAP (Southern Appalachian Planners) Team included the Forest Planners from the five national forests and the Regional Planners. This group held numerous meetings, most of which were open to the public, to determine and implement a coordinated approach to developing and analyzing the alternatives.
- The FWRBE (Fisheries, Wildlife, Range, Botany, and Ecology) Team was comprised of various specialists (wildlife, fisheries, etc.) from the forests and the region. This team developed a consistent approach to addressing those issues relating to terrestrial and aquatic species and their habitats including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species; species of viability concern; and rare communities. Most of these meetings were also open to the public.
- The SARRWAG (Southern Appalachian Recreation, Rivers, Wilderness Advisory Group) included recreation specialists from the forests and the region and developed a consistent approach to addressing recreation-related issues,

evaluating roadless areas, managing Wilderness areas, studying Wild and Scenic Rivers, and where applicable – the management of the Appalachian Trail.

- The Riparian Team, comprised of hydrologists, soil scientists, and aquatic biologists, worked on developing a consistent approach to addressing water- and riparian-related issues.

In addition to the team efforts described above, some specific actions were taken to achieve a consistent approach to the planning process. They included:

- All the Forests working on the same schedule/timeline, starting with the issuance of a Notice of Intent to revise the forest plans for the five forests (on August 2, 1996), continuing on through the publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statements and the Final Environmental Impact Statements.
- Developing a common set of significant issues, which are described in Chapter 1.
- Developing a common set of Management Prescriptions. A team of representatives from the five forests and the regional office held a series of meetings, some of which were open to the public, to develop a common set of "generic" management prescriptions. First, "categories" of prescriptions were identified and then "emphasis statements" were developed to address the various issues. Descriptions of the "desired conditions" that would result from implementing the management prescriptions were then developed. Later, the Forest IDTs took these "generic" descriptions of the prescriptions and "localized" them to meet local conditions. The Management Prescriptions used in all the Alternatives developed for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests are listed in Table 2-1.
- A coordinated approach to developing the alternatives, which is described below.

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The alternative development process consisted of four different phases. The process involved a coordinated effort of the staffs of the five national forests of the Southern Appalachian area, with frequent meetings that were open to the public.

Phase I identified different ways the significant issues could be addressed.
Phase II developed four alternative themes using the information obtained in Phase I. These alternative themes were the starting points for developing alternatives. The four themes were:

A. Produce high levels of goods and services compatible with local economies and communities.
B. Give priority to restoring natural resources and processes.
C. Nature operates in conjunction with minimal human intervention.

D. Provide vigorously growing trees, commercial wood products and a variety of wildlife habitats in a generally natural-appearing setting.

Phase III involved mapping the four alternative themes and "current direction" (under the 1985 Plan). The Phase III maps showed the land allocations, with each allocation consisting of a management emphasis, desired condition, and applicable management direction.

The objectives of Phase IV of the alternative development process were to analyze the four alternative themes to determine whether modifications were needed, whether other alternatives needed to be developed, and whether there were any areas of consensus. Public participation in both Phases III and IV was extensive and critically important to the overall process of developing alternatives. A description of public meetings and public involvement activities is available in Appendix A.

Based on input from all five Southern Appalachian forests and the public on the five forests, changes were made and additional alternatives were developed to address a variety of issues and to provide a spectrum of alternatives to analyze and consider. The original four alternative themes (with some modifications) became Alternatives A-D, the Current Direction (no-action) Alternative became Alternative F, and three new alternatives (Alternatives E, G and H) were developed.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE I

Later, it was decided to develop a ninth alternative (Alternative I). A set of design criteria was developed for this alternative, which incorporated those parts of Alternatives A-H where there appeared to be some general agreement from our publics. A hallmark of Alternative I throughout the process was that it 'rolled' or changed incrementally over time. As a result of this development strategy, Alternative I was often referred to as the "Rolling Alternative." Initially, this was to 'roll' the best features of each of the other alternatives into its earliest form. Later, it continued to change with analysis and more public input. Between draft and final, Alternative I 'rolled' once more in response to comment and to fulfill commitments made at the draft for rare community allocations. These changes are described in considerable detail in the following paragraphs.

'Alternative I' as it appears throughout the FEIS refers to the modified Alternative I. Every affected topic was re-analyzed and the analysis results were updated as applicable from those shown in the draft. All the data and quantities related to Alternative I in the text are Modified I data and quantities. At one stage in the development of the Final EIS, the notation 'I_M' was used, especially in table headings. There may be vestiges of this nomenclature in the text or tables. It is synonymous with 'Alternative I.'

CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT AND FINAL

Changes between draft and final were of two types; changes in land allocations and changes in plan direction. Forestwide goals, objectives, and standards as well as management prescription desired future condition descriptions, objectives, and standards were intensively revised. However, the changes remained within the overall Alternative I emphasis as presented at the draft.

The revised red-cockaded woodpecker Recovery Plan was issued by the USFWS concurrently with the release of the Forests' Draft EIS and Plan. Subsequent consultation with the USFWS resulted in refining and strengthening management direction for the RCW and integrating into the Plan the guidance of the recovery plan.

Between the draft and final publication, the Chattahoochee-Oconee IDT replaced the designated Wild and Scenic River prescription (MRx 2.A series) with the one from the Sumter NF for the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. Originally, the Chattahoochee NF MRx 2.A prescriptions had been written to prospectively include those streams recommended for Wild and Scenic River designation (MRx 2.B series). Public comments took rather strong exception to this approach as running counter to the identification of the Chattooga River as a separate issue. Several people asked for the identical prescription for the Chattooga River. This was done for the final, recognizing that the 2.A prescription series will not fit additional Wild and Scenic designations.

Another source of change was a refined effort to ensure that rare communities (MRx 9.F) and botanic/zoologic areas (MRx 4.D) were allocated. The commitment to improve in this regard was made in the draft and these changes were a follow-through.

The riparian corridor prescription was intensively edited between draft and final. Field tests of application showed that as written at the draft it would compromise the accomplishment of wildlife habitat objectives, includiung T&E habitat. Consultation with the USFWS and coordination with the Georgia Forestry Commission and the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division also demonstrated the need and the opportunity to refine and clarify direction. One specific and significant improvement was to recognize the difference between major and minor actions, using NEPA criteria for this distinction. Another refinement was that the width distances of the Riparian Corridor Management Prescription proposed in the Draft Forest Plan were revised to; (1) provide variable widths that fit terrain characteristics by ecological section, (2) provide direction that complies with the streamside management zone distances identified in Georgia's Best Management Practices for Forestry. Making these coincident responds well to the Georgia Forestry Commission's role in non-point source pollution compliance under the State Implementation Plan for the Clean Water Act. It also ensures that State programs are seamless with national forest. Riparian direction was also strengthened by ensuring that only potentially harmful activities were constrained and beneficial ones were not.

Substantial analysis was done to validate more fully and to refine objective quantities. These were modeled for locations with highest probability to be used to satisfy each objective within the decision space allowed by plan management direction. Objective quantities have been refined based on that analysis. Additional objectives were added to more fully round out accomplishment of goals. Direction was screened by the IDT and other Forest Service personnel to ensure that it was clear and could be implemented in the field.

In the process of responding to comments, changes were also made to plan direction, including allocations, as part of the response. The Forest IDT considered each comment that would require a re-allocation change to the Plan individually. They did not make every re-allocation or text change recommended. Many of the requested reallocations were found to be already in prescriptions that were protective of the concern expressed, though perhaps not the prescription the commenter preferred. In some cases re-allocations desired were so extensive as to have re-created one of the other alternatives.

Supplemental text was added to the EIS or Plan where it was clear there was a misunderstanding of what was intended or where the usefulness of the documents would be improved. For example, the explanation of the inter-relationship of Forestwide and management prescription direction was strengthened. The role of objectives was more fully explained. The use of GIS data was also more fully explained.

Specific comments and the response to them are in the Response to Comments Appendix of the FEIS.

There were numerous re-allocations on the Chattahoochee, as shown in Table 2- 1. (Management prescriptions that had no change are not shown.) Recommended wilderness (MRx 1.B) was reduced 63 acres near Tate City to put the recommended boundary on a ridge and avoid future conflict with infrastructure provision into private land. A recommended addition to a scenic section of a wild and scenic river was increased due to a land acquisition. A stream segment allocated to 4.H was re-allocated to a botanic/zoologic area in response to public comments. Botanic and zoologic communities were increased by slightly over 2,500 acres. The Trackrock Gap Cultural/Heritage Area was expanded. Identification of administrative and communi-cations sites was refined. Almost 2,700 acres were added to old growth (MRX 6.B). The Richard Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway Corridor was re-allocated from several prescriptions to the 7.A Scenic Byway prescription; this was the largest single change. A block of 8.A.2, Forest Interior Mid to Late Successional Habitat was reallocated to 8.A.1 Mix of Successional Forest Habitats in response to public comment on wildlife habitat. An area inappropriately mapped as a source water watershed was corrected. Changes to other prescriptions were as a result of these changes.

Table 2- 1. Acreage Changes in Alternative I Management Prescription Allocations Between Draft and Final Plan for the Chattahoochee National Forest.

MRx	Management Prescription Name	Alt. I (Draft)	Alt. I (Final)	Change (Acres)
1.B	Recommended Wilderness	8,157	8,094	-63
12.A	Remote Backcountry Recreation	28,241	28,260	18
2.B.1	Recommended Wild Section - W & S River	2,571	2,120	-451
2.B.2	Recommended Scenic Section - W&S River	343	524	180
3.C	Ed Jenkins National Recreation Area	23,608	23,660	53
4.A	Appalachian National Scenic Trail Corridor	16,507	16,645	138
4.D	Botanic - Zoologic Areas	859	3,363	2,504
4.E.1	Cultural - Heritage Area	46	191	145
4.F	Scenic Areas	21,126	18,129	-2,997
4.F.1	Regional Forester Scenic & Wildlife Mgmt Areas	19,876	18,426	-1,451
4.F.2	Regional Forester Designated Scenic Areas	4,725	4,797	72
4.H	Forest Designated Outstandingly Remarkable Streams	19,298	17,869	-1,430
4.I	Natural Areas - Few Open Roads	17,903	17,943	40
5.A	Administrative Sites	117	163	46
5.B	Communications Sites	0	48	48
6.B	Areas Managed to Restore/Maintain Old Growth Characteristics	25,370	28,059	2,689
7.A	Scenic Byway Corridor	2,037	12,431	10,394
7.B	Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds	16,834	16,642	-192
7.E.1	Dispersed Recreation Areas	76,302	74,359	-1,943
7.E.2	Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management	21,514	22,562	1,048
8.A.1	Mix of Successional Forest Habitats	65,882	68,323	2,441
8.A.2	Forest Interior Mid to Late Successional Forest Habitat	26,730	23,693	-3,037
8.E.3	High Elevation Early Successional Habitat	6,875	6,604	-271
9.A.1	Source Water Protection Watersheds	10,127	9,325	-802
9.A.3	Watershed Restoration Areas	17,767	17,854	87
9.F	Rare Communities	0	505	505
9.H	Management Maintenance & Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential	177,707	172,725	-4,982

Re-allocations on the Oconee were less extensive (Table 2- 2, below). In response to public comment, a block of land providing access to the Appalachee River was re-allocated from a custodial to a recreation emphasis. The Ocmulgee River wild and scenic river mapping was refined from an air-distance buffer to terrain features, resulting in a decrease in acreage. The Scull Shoals Experimental Forest, incorrectly identified as a Regional Forester designation in the draft, was moved from MRx 4.G.1 Regional Forester Experimental Forest into MRx 3.B Chief-designated Experimental Forest. Almost 600 acres were allocated to MRx 9.F Rare Communities and more acres were allocated to MRx 4.D Botanic and Zoologic Areas.

Table 2- 2. Acreage Changes in Alternative I Management Prescription Allocations Between Draft and Final Plan for the Oconee National Forest.

MRx	Management Prescription Name	Alt. I (Draft)	Alt. I (Final)	Change (Acres)
0	Custodial	368	143	-226
2.B.2	Recommended Scenic Section - W&S River	4,855	3,582	-1,273
3.B	Hitchiti and Scull Shoals Experimental Forests	4,638	9,363	4,725
4.D	Botanic - Zoologic Areas	1,082	1,214	131
4.E.1	Cultural - Heritage Area	96	112	15
4.G.1	Regional Forester Experimental Forest	4,958	0	-4,958
4.H	Forest Designated Outstandingly Remarkable Streams	4,897	4,889	-8
5.A	Administrative Sites	101	102	1
7.E.2	Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management	8,224	8,384	161
8.D	Red Cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Management Areas	31,415	31,669	254
8.D.1	Red Cockaded Woodpecker Sub-Habitat Management Areas	15,852	16,461	609
9.F	Rare Communities	0	594	594
9.H	Management, Maintenance & Restoration of Plant Associations to their Ecological Potential	35,123	35,576	454

Direction in the National Roadless Area Conservation Rule was also considered in the period following the issuance of the DEIS. However, the Forest Service was enjoined from applying this direction, subject to ongoing efforts to revise the rule. The Revised Forest Plan addresses protection of those areas in both a forestwide standard and within specific affected management prescriptions. Specifically, it constrains management activities to ensure that inventoried roadless areas continue to meet Forest Service roadless criteria throughout this plan cycle.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

As was described above, there were originally nine different alternatives. However, as the planning process proceeded, it was determined that two of the alternatives that were developed did not need to be further evaluated in greater detail. Descriptions of those two alternatives and the reasons they were not studied further are explained below.

ALTERNATIVE C

Alternative C would emphasize resource management with minimal human intervention to the natural resources. Active management would be for the protection of resources, for meeting legal requirements, and for maintaining current recreation opportunities.

Potential old-growth areas would, within a few decades, come to represent the majority of the forest as a result of minimal management activity. There would be no regular, periodic harvest of green timber; therefore, no "suitable" forest land. The landscape character would change, moving toward high scenic integrity. Emphasis would be on dispersed and non-motorized recreation opportunities. No new developed recreation facilities would be constructed.

All inventoried roadless areas would be recommended for wilderness designation. Risk of loss of critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, danger to forest visitors, risk of damage to private property through Forest Service inaction, or introduction of an exotic pest would be considered unhealthy forest conditions requiring human intervention. Human intervention would also be used to maintain or increase existing rare communities. The majority of the eligible wild and scenic rivers would be recommended for inclusion to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Roads not needed for legal requirements and other resource needs would be closed or obliterated.

Reasons Alternative C Eliminated From Detailed Study

The management prescriptions applicable to this alternative were allocated and mapped, and some preliminary estimates of the impacts of the alternative were made. After considering this preliminary information, it was determined that Alternative C did not need to be further evaluated in this EIS. The reasons are:

1) From further analyses it was determined that this alternative, as originally envisioned, would not meet all the legal requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (MUSYA) and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA);
2) Alternative C only addresses some, but not all, of the forest planning issues that have been identified by the public;

3) Other alternatives considered in detail provide for relatively low levels of management activities; and
4) Alternative C is similar to the "Minimum Level Benchmark" discussed in Appendix B.

The 219 regulations specify that the planning team should "formulate a broad range of reasonable alternatives according to NEPA procedures" *(36 CFR 219.12(f))*. With respect to meeting NEPA procedures, the alternatives developed need to respond to the "purpose and need." The "purpose and need" of revising the forest plan is to address the changing conditions that were identified in the Southern Appalachian Assessment, the Forest's Analysis of the Management Situation, and the changing public values as represented by the 12 common issues and 4 local issues. Alternative C, with its emphasis on "minimal human intervention" would not address all these issues, and would not meet the "purpose and need" as required by NEPA.

Another expression of the "purpose and need" of the forest plans is in the NFMA regulations where it states that the "resulting plans shall provide for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner" *(36 CFR 219.1*). The Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act states that the Secretary of Agriculture should "develop and administer the renewable surface resources of the national forests for multiple use and sustained yield of the several products and services obtained there from" (Section 2). Again, with its focus on "minimal human intervention", Alternative C is not an alternative that would provide "for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services."

Additionally, the requirement to "maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area" *(36 CFR 219.19)* would not be met. When this alternative was originally developed, it was thought that relatively few acres would need to be "actively managed" in order to meet this requirement. However, after more analysis was conducted on the habitat needs of various species, it was determined that there are a number of species that depend on ecological communities that can only be maintained by frequent levels of disturbance. As is explained in chapter 3 of this EIS, a significant level of management is needed (at least over the next 10 to 50 years) to restore and maintain these disturbance-dependant communities. A certain amount of "human intervention" is needed to get these communities into the desired conditions of composition and structure, so that in the future, natural disturbances along with appropriate prescribed fire levels could maintain these communities. However, the levels of management activities that would be needed over the next 10 to 50 years to create these conditions would be inconsistent with the overall goal of Alternative C to have "minimal human intervention".

To further illustrate the need for a certain level of active management, Chapter 4 of the Southern Forest Resource Assessment (*Effects of Forest Management on Terrestrial Ecosystems*) states:

- "The exact nature and condition of these forests and disturbance regimes are unknown, but the presence of large grazing herbivores and fire-adapted forest communities suggests that much of this forest land was relatively open and subject to regular disturbances" (p. 92).
- "Today there are more forested acres in the South than in the early 1900s. These forests, however, are greatly altered from forests encountered by European settlers. … The common theme for the last 10,000 years is that forests were managed to meet human needs, including those of Native Americans" (p. 93).
- "We should recognize, however, that removal of all human disturbances will have profound effects on the region's biota" (p. 93).
- "To avoid regional population declines and species losses, land managers must have the flexibility to promote active management. This region's biota does not thrive in a static system, and intentional neglect does nothing but promote additional extinctions and endangerment to species at risk… This flexibility should not extend to the other extreme of promoting intensive forestry for wildlife conservation, but it does suggest that some level of active management will be necessary to maintain many still extant but imperiled species, including many found on present or set-aside lands" (p. 93).

With respect to the agency's "Healthy Forests Initiative," a management emphasis of the agency is to change the situation where forests, overloaded with fuels, are vulnerable to severe wildland fires. Minimizing "human intervention" would increase susceptibility of the forest to insect and disease outbreaks, which would create increased fuel-loading problems, and increase the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands. Alternative C would not address these areas of concern.

Apart from the low levels of human intervention, the other aspects of this alternative such as large acreages in old-growth or late–successional conditions, maintaining roadless area characteristics, and providing for an emphasis on dispersed recreation activities, etc., are similarly represented in Alternatives E and G.

While Alternative C would address some of the issues, there are other management issues that have been raised by the public that this alternative does not address. In addition to the forest health and wildlife habitat management concerns expressed above, Alternative C does not address the issue that there are demands for various forest products such as high-quality sawtimber, which are of limited supply from private lands, but are available from National Forest lands.

Lastly, the Minimum Level Benchmark is "the minimum level of management which would be needed to maintain and protect the unit as part of the National Forest System together with associated costs and benefits" *(36 CFR 219.12(e)(1)(i))*. This is essentially the same management emphasis as Alternative C and a further description of this level of management can be found in Appendix B.

As a result of all these factors, it was determined that further study of this alternative was not needed.

ALTERNATIVE H

- Active resource management to achieve multiple-use objectives
- All lands classified as unsuitable for timber production, so no regulated timber harvest
- Wide diversity of wildlife habitats provided
- Old growth on lands currently withdrawn from the suitable land base
- Watershed restoration emphasized
- Increased recreation opportunities
- Increased public access

Alternative H would provide for active resource management to achieve multiple-use objectives with all lands classified as unsuitable for timber production. There would be no regulated timber harvest. A wide diversity of wildlife habitats would be provided. Scenic integrity would be based on the existing inventory of scenic class. Small natural openings would be mimicked, when possible. Emphasis would be on habitats for forest interior species. These would be managed for "high" to "very high" scenic integrity.

Old-growth allocation and management would be primarily on lands already withdrawn from the suitable timber base. Restoration of degraded watersheds would be emphasized to improve aquatic habitats and water quality. There would be no regular, periodic harvest of green timber; therefore, no "suitable" land. Highways and roads in the forests, trail and river corridors, and recreation-use areas would have forest stands with few, if any, broken views to support enhancements in tourism and local, rural economies. Recreation areas and opportunities would be increased throughout a variety of settings.

This alternative responds to the "Healthy Forests Initiative" by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependent communities.

SAA-inventoried roadless areas adjacent to existing wilderness areas could be recommended for wilderness designation. Exotic pests and/or undesirable species would be controlled. All wild and scenic rivers would be recommended for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, if they do not conflict with other resources. Eligible wild and scenic rivers not recommended for inclusion into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System would be allocated to a management prescription that protects these rivers and manages them similarly to congressionally designated rivers. Public access (travelways, use corridors, waterways, and trails (including those for off-highway vehicles) would be increased in high-use areas and/or improved to provide for more opportunities for recreation.

Reasons Alternative H Eliminated From Detailed Study

When the management prescriptions applicable to this alternative were allocated and mapped, there was virtually no difference between this alternative and Alternative G. The allocations were essentially the same, and therefore, the environmental effects would be essentially the same. The only significant difference between Alternative G and Alternative H was that in Alternative G, the majority of those acres being managed through silvicultural harvesting methods were classified as acres "suitable for timber production," while in Alternative H, those same acres and same management activities would be classified as "unsuited for timber production." Since this is more of an administrative classification change, and there would be no differences in the overall outputs and environmental effects, it was decided that this alternative did not need to be considered in further detail in this Environmental Impact Statement.

GEORGIA BLUE RIDGE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

At one point, there was a proposal to recommend to Congress the designation of a Blue Ridge National Recreation Area as part of Alternative I. The proposed area of approximately 41,700 acres would have been located in northeast Georgia between the Brasstown, Chattooga, and Tallulah Ranger Districts of the Chattahoochee NF. The area would be about 50 miles from the Atlanta metro area, and 80 miles from the Chattanooga, TN, and Greenville SC metro areas. The NRA proposal was suggested to be a compromise between various interests that wanted more wildlife management and more wilderness areas. Because the NRA would have been designated, a number of individual management prescriptions would have been eliminated on a separate basis, but could have been included within the designating legislation of the NRA.

The natural amenities that would be contained within the NRA would be the proposed Chattahoochee Wild and Scenic River; Kelly Ridge inventoried roadless area; Tripp Branch inventoried roadless area; four streams classified as 'Chattahoochee-Oconee Outstandingly Remarkable Streams' (MRx 4H), which are: the North and South Forks of Moccasin Creek; High Shoals Branch; and Corbin Creek. It would contain both Anna Ruby Falls Scenic Area, and High Shoals Falls Scenic Area, plus 15,600 additional acres classified as Class 1 Scenic area. There would be portions of three GA-DNR Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) - Chattahoochee, Swallows Creek, and Lake Burton.

Man-made amenities would include 8 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (A.T.); the Brasstown Scenic Byway; Anna Ruby Falls Visitor Center; six developed campgrounds, including: Low Gap, Upper Chattahoochee, Andrews Cove, Dicks Creek Gap, and Wildcat 1 and 2. There is a parking area at Jasus Creek and a shelter at Deep Creek Gap on the A.T..

Amenities that are adjacent to the proposal area are the Federally-designated Tray Mountain and Mark Trail Wilderness Areas; Unicoi State Park; Moccasin Creek State Fish Hatchery and Moccasin Creek State Park; Lake Chatuge and Lake Burton.

This proposal was not included within any alternatives due to its not being responsive to any issue and the prevailing lack of sentiment from cooperators and the public that had requested more wilderness areas and more wildlife habitat maintenance and restorations.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

ALTERNATIVE DESCRIPTIONS

Descriptions of the Alternatives considered in detail are provided in this section. For each Alternative, there is a set of three tables showing the acreage allocated to each management prescription for the three ecological sections: Ridge and Valley, Blue Ridge (including the Chattooga Ranger District portion of the Piedmont), and Oconee.

There are two possible sources for National Forest System lands acreage figures. One is the Lands staff records with acreages generated from deeds and land surveys. These are the 'official' acres for legal purposes. The other is digitized Geographic Information System (GIS) data, maintained as data 'layers.' Two important layers we used extensively are the 'surface ownership,' a digitized coverage of National Forest lands, and a 'stands' layer of vegetation community polygons. As these and other data layers are related through the GIS, the correlation is typically less than perfect, resulting in 'slivers' where lines are not strictly coincident. Depending upon the importance of stronger correlation, extensive work went into minimizing this 'sliver' challenge. Two examples were 'cutting' stand polygons to be coincident with designated Wild and Scenic River boundaries and with inventoried roadless area boundaries. But an absolute match between GIS and Lands acreages would have been very labor intensive, and was not necessary. The GIS data and the Lands data were correlated to a much less than 1-percent difference in the total acres of each of the Chattahoochee and Oconee as of September 2003. **Unless otherwise identified, acreage figures used throughout this EIS were generated from GIS data. In most cases, the acreage figures represent a summation from individual stand polygons.** Our intention was to attribute every table with the data source to avoid confusion.

Table 2- 3 identifies the management prescriptions referenced by prescription number in the acreage tables.

Table 2- 3. Management Prescription Titles

MRx	MRx Title
0.B	Custodial Management - Small, Isolated Land Areas (expected to be disposed of or exchanged)
1.A	Designated Wilderness Areas
1.B	Recommended Wilderness Study Areas
2.A	Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers
2.A.1	Designated Wild River Segments
2.A.2	Designated Scenic River Segments
2.A.3	Designated Recreational River Segments
2.B.1	Recommended Wild River Segments
2.B.2	Recommended Scenic River Segments
2.B.3	Recommended Recreational River Segments
3.A	National Scenic Areas
3.B	Experimental Forests
3.C	National Recreation Areas
3.D	Proposed National Recreation Areas
4.A	Appalachian National Scenic Trail Corridor
4.B.1	Murder Creek Research Natural Area
4.C	Geologic and Paleontologic Area
4.D	Botanical - Zoological Areas
4.E.1	Cultural/Heritage Areas
4.F	Scenic Areas
4.F.1	Scenic and Wildlife Management Areas
4.F.2	Regional Forester Designated Scenic Areas (pre-1985)
4.H	Forest-Designated Outstandingly Remarkable Streams
4.I	Natural Areas - Few Open Roads
4.J	Urban/Suburban Interface
5.A	Administrative Sites
5.B	Communication Sites
5.D	Military-Use Areas (Camp Merrill)
6.A	Old Growth Forest Communities – Emphasize Natural Processes
6.B	Areas Managed to Restore/Maintain Old-Growth Characteristics
6.C	Old Growth Managed with Natural Processes and Restoration Activities
6.D	Core Areas of Old-Growth Surrounded by Areas with Extended Forest Rotations
6.E	Old Growth Core Areas Surrounded by Uneven-Aged Management
7.A	Scenic Byway Corridor
7.B	Scenic Corridors and Sensitive Viewsheds

Table continued next page.

MRx	MRx Title
7.C	OHV Use Areas
7.D	Concentrated Recreation Zones, Including Developed Recreation Sites
7.E.1	Dispersed Recreation Areas
7.E.2	Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management
8.A.1	Mix of Successional Forest Habitats
8.A.2	Forest Interior, Mid- to Late-Successional Forest Habitats
8.B	Mix of Successional Habitats – Emphasize Early Successional
8.B.1	Early Successional Habitat Emphasis
8.D	Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat
8.D.1	Red-cockaded Woodpecker Sub-habitat Management Areas
8.E.1	Ruffed Grouse Management
8.E.3	High-Elevation, Early-Successional Habitat
9.A.1	Source Water Protection Watersheds
9.A.3	Watershed Restoration Areas
9.G	Maintain and Restore Upland and Bottomland Hardwoods and Mixed Pine-Hardwood Forests
9.H	Management, Maintenance, and Restoration of Plant Associations to Their Ecological Potential
10.A	Sustained Yield Timber Management
10.B	High Quality Forest Products
10.E	Timber Management with Recreation Emphasis
11	Riparian Corridors
12.A	Remote Backcountry Recreation - Few Open Roads
12.B	Remote Backcountry Recreation – Non-Motorized

ALTERNATIVE A

- Emphasize goods and services to local economies
- Manage timber for sustained yield of high quality sawtimber
- Manage wildlife for public-demand game and non-game species
- Enhance developed and dispersed recreation opportunities
- Increase scenery at "high" quality rating
- Increase public access to the forest to enhance recreation opportunities
- Expand watershed restoration efforts to improve fisheries
- Promote old growth on land withdrawn from the suitable land base
- Actively manage vegetation to reduce the risk of insects and diseases

Alternative A would emphasize production of goods and services beneficial to local economies and communities. Local communities include any community that benefits economically from forest visitors and forest products. Timber management would provide sustained yield of wood products with emphasis on high-quality sawtimber. In areas where vegetation management is permitted, it would be actively pursued to reach and maintain a condition of low risk of insect and disease problems, especially in those areas where timber production would be emphasized. Wildlife management would put priority on public-demand species, including game and other species.

Highways and roads in the forests, trail and river corridors, and recreation-use areas would have forest stands with few, if any, broken views. Improved scenery values support tourism and local, rural economies. Developed and dispersed recreation opportunities and high-quality scenery would be provided in a variety of settings both natural and managed. Public access via travelways, use corridors, waterways, and trails (including those for off-highway vehicles) would be increased or improved in high-use areas to provide for more recreation opportunities

Restoration of degraded watersheds would be expanded to improve aquatic habitats and water quality. Old-growth allocation and management would be primarily on lands already withdrawn (in current Forest Plans) from the suitable timber base. SAA-inventoried roadless areas adjacent to or in close proximity to wilderness areas that receive high-use would also be recommended for wilderness designation.

This alternative responds to the "Healthy Forests Initiative" by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependent communities.

Table 2- 4. Ridge and Valley – Alt. A Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
10.B	28,487	7.A	2,037
4.F.2	236	7.C	2,730
4.I	2,117	7.D	193
5.A	2	7.E.1	6,114
6.A	13,209	9.H	3,034
6.D	6,604		

Table 2- 5. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt. A Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	2,090	3.A	7,122	6.D	6,719
1.A	118,058	3.C	23,676	7.A	55,303
1.B	7,559	3.D	2,450	7.B	21,085
10.B	168,097	4.A	14,313	7.C	13,516
10.E	15,187	4.C	430	7.D	2,983
12.A	42,312	4.D	440	7.E.1	56,012
12.B	2,251	4.F	10,842	8.A.1	33,542
2.A.1	5,998	4.F.2	4,474	8.A.2	9,945
2.A.2	468	4.H	6,476	8.B	13,764
2.A.3	1,551	4.I	8,981	9.A.1	8,294
2.B.1	5,660	5.A	114	9.A.3	7,898
2.B.2	1,135	5.D	144		
2.B.3	5,101	6.B	947		

Table 2- 6. Oconee – Alt. A Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
10.A	17,331	5.A	101
2.B.2	5,276	7.C	1,978
3.B	9,597	7.D	1,530
4.B.1	1,005	7.E.2	5
4.D	346	8.D	30,154
4.E.1	353	8.D.1	15,922
4.H	5,530	9.G	26,082

ALTERNATIVE B

- Biologically driven to emphasize restoring the natural resources and processes
- Emphasizes creating and maintaining wildlife habitats
- Natural process would be mimicked in a natural landscape pattern
- Large and small openings may be created
- Variety of recreation opportunities available if compatible with restoration
- Timber management to be done if wildlife habitats enhanced
- Old growth emphasized with a goal to create pre-settlement conditions
- Riparian ecosystems emphasized
- Scenic qualities would be enhanced over time (may be short-term impacts)
- Roadless areas with high value wildlife needs would not be recommended to wilderness
- The role of insects and disease in ecosystem would be accepted except in epidemic conditions. Exotic pests would be controlled
- Generally, amount of long-term permanent access would be reduced. Access in the short-term, may increase as needed to achieve management goals

Alternative B would be biologically driven and would emphasize restoring the natural resources and natural processes and creating and maintaining wildlife habitats. Emphasis would be on restoration of vegetation to potential natural vegetation (plant associations) based on the ecological potential and capability of the land and providing a mix of the wildlife habitats for game and non-game species. Restoration activities would occur in areas where technology is available to implement. When possible, natural processes would be mimicked in a natural landscape pattern. Restoration activities could produce both large and small openings. Long-term restoration goals would be established for areas where technology is not currently available or for areas where restoration activities cannot be implemented or completed within the life of the revised Forest Plan. A variety of recreation settings would occur in areas where they would be compatible with restoration activities and in areas where restoration is not occurring. Management for wood products would occur only in concert with restoration and creating wildlife habitats. Timber sales would become a by-product of restoration management and wildlife habitats.

This alternative responds to the “Healthy Forests Initiative” by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependant communities.

The long-term goal would be to provide old-growth conditions by old-growth community types within the ecological province or section similar to that existing before large-scale, extensive pioneer settlement and land uses. Riparian ecosystems would be managed to maintain water quality and aquatic ecosystems and to restore

degraded conditions. Timber production would be a result of management to restore and maintain specific impaired or degraded resources, natural processes, communities, and wildlife habitats. In some areas of the forests, scenic resources would move gradually toward "high" to "very high" scenic integrity. Restoration of areas would result in short-term, "low" to "moderate" scenic integrity, but with a long-term goal of a "high" rating. A wide variety of recreation opportunities would be provided. Roadless areas with identified forest type restoration needs or wildlife habitat needs in conflict with wilderness designation would not be recommended for wilderness; other roadless areas could be recommended for wilderness study. The role of native insects and disease would be accepted, except that epidemics would be suppressed to reduce large-scale catastrophic tree mortality. Nonnative species would be controlled where feasible. Any riparian restoration activities affecting designated or candidate wild and scenic river segments would be made compatible with wild and scenic river classification and the outstandingly remarkable values of the stream. Management access to degraded resources, areas in need of restoration, or areas where wildlife habitat needs occur could be temporarily provided to maintain or restore desirable ecological conditions. Access would be reduced as needed to restore and protect aquatic systems, soils, and plant/animal communities.

Table 2- 7. Ridge and Valley – Alt. B Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
4.F.2	236	7.A	2,037
4.I	1,703	7.D	193
5.A	2	7.E.1	,2518
6.A	5,164	8.A.1	33,303
6.B	7,880	9.H	11,728

Table 2- 8. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt. B Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	1,123	2.B.1	5,660	4.I	4,518	8.A.2	62,402
1.A	118,075	2.B.2	1,215	4.J	4,925	8.B	17,266
1.B	17,982	2.B.3	2,362	5.A	114	8.E.1	2,556
10.A	135	4.A	14,313	5.D	144	9.A.1	8,294
2.A.1	5,998	4.F	1	6.A	8,886	9.A.3	18,516
2.A.2	468	4.F.2	4,474	6.B	4,373	9.H	184,184
2.A.3	1,551	4.H	9,220	8.A.1	152,871		

Table 2- 9. Oconee – Alt. B Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
2.B.2	3,850	4.H	6,956	8.D	30,154
3.B	9,597	4.I	844	8.D.1	15,874
4.B.1	1,005	5.A	101	9.G	25,946
4.D	25	7.D	1,530	9.H	18,171
4.E.1	1,152	7.E.2	5		

ALTERNATIVE D

- All suitable lands available for sustained yield management
- Major forest types would have a specific target "rotation" age that would be harvested and replaced with a new forest
- Approximately equal acres in each age class
- Age classes would be distributed across the forest in 15- to 40- acre blocks
- Production of wood products and a variety of aquatic and wildlife habitats would be emphasized
- Developed and dispersed recreation opportunities provided
- Old growth provided on unsuitable lands
- Access would be increased and maintained to facilitate management activities

A major objective of Alternative D would be to reach and maintain a balanced age class. All lands not meeting National Forest Management Act criteria, as being unsuitable for sustained yield timber management would be available for sustained-yield management. On suitable lands, each of the major forest groups (pine, mixed, and hardwood) would have a specific target rotation age, the age at which it would be harvested and replaced with a new forest.

There would be an approximately equal number of acres within each 10-year age class up to that rotation age. This "balance of age classes" would occur on lands identified as suitable and would be distributed in 15- to 40-acre blocks throughout the lands being managed for sustained-yield timber production. Pine, mixed, and hardwood forests older than the rotation age also would occur on large blocks of land already withdrawn from sustained-yield timber production. Production of both commercial wood products and a variety of aquatics/wildlife habitats would be emphasized. Developed and dispersed recreation opportunities would be provided in a variety of settings, both natural and managed. Water quality and riparian corridors would be protected through BMPs, streamside management zones, and standards. Restoration would be pursued, if needed. Streamside management zones would be included in the suitable timber base, with minimum widths based on applicable regulations.

This alternative responds to the "Healthy Forests Initiative" by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependent communities.

Large- and medium-sized blocks of old growth would be provided only on unsuitable land. Small blocks would occur scattered throughout the suitable lands on steep slopes, streamside management zones, or similar areas. The forests would appear highly variable in tree sizes and openings in the canopy may be seen from roadways

and vista points. Potential roaded natural (RN 1, 2) experiences would increase as access roads for timber harvest are built or improved. The semi-primitive experiences would be primarily on unsuited lands. Only those roadless areas that are already withdrawn from sustained-yield timber production by Congress, the Secretary of Agriculture, or the Chief of the Forest Service would be recommended as wilderness. Insects, diseases, and exotic plant and animal species on suitable lands would be actively controlled and prevented. Some of the eligible wild and scenic rivers would be recommended for inclusion to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Access would be developed, maintained, and used as needed to meet the goal of balanced age classes, wildlife habitats, and production of timber products.

Table 2- 10. Ridge and Valley – Alt. D Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
10.A	36,439	6.D	5,567
10.B	13,727	7.A	2,742
4.F.2	236	7.C	2,730
5.A	2	7.D	193
6.A	2,810	9.H	316

Table 2- 11. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt. D Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	833	3.A	7,122	6.B	316
1.A	118,058	3.C	23,736	6.C	9,971
1.B	16,123	3.D	2,450	6.D	9,145
10.A	154,641	4.A	14,313	7.A	22,220
10.B	122,955	4.C	430	7.B	10,162
10.E	68,658	4.F	2,392	7.C	3,524
12.B	1,699	4.F.2	4,474	7.D	4,231
2.A.1	5,998	4.H	4,021	7.E.1	4,027
2.A.2	468	4.J	2,518	8.A.1	164
2.A.3	1,551	5.A	114	8.A.2	15,352
2.B.1	5,660	5.D	144	9.A.1	8,295
2.B.2	3,625	6.A	17,297	9.H	13,146
2.B.3	5,101				

Table 2- 12. Oconee – Alt. D Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
10.A	18,544	5.A	101
2.B.2	10,806	7.D	1,438
3.B	9,597	7.E.2	5
4.B.1	1,005	8.D	30,743
4.D	25	8.D.1	15,922
4.E.1	353	9.G	26,671

ALTERNATIVE E

- Active resource management to attract recreation users
- Most areas would maintain a forest canopy
- Large blocks of the forest would be maintained in roadless condition to provide remote, backcountry recreation
- A variety of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities would increase
- OHV vehicle use would increase
- A variety of wildlife habitats would be maintained across the landscape
- Timber management geared to high quality large diameter trees

A combination of a natural settings and concentrated facilities that could attract a variety of recreation users would be provided. Active resource management would be concentrated in certain locations and would support recreation use and visual quality. Most areas would maintain a forested canopy. Large blocks of the forest would be maintained in a roadless condition to provide remote, backcountry recreation. Dispersed and developed recreation areas and opportunities would be increased. A variety of recreation experiences would occur, including concentrated use and off-highway vehicle use. A variety of different wildlife habitats would be maintained in blocks across the landscape. Habitats for forest interior species would be accomplished through maintenance of a variety of successional classes in a manner that would be unnoticeable to most forest visitors. A substantial amount of the forest would be allocated to providing old growth for biological and aesthetic values in large, medium, and small patches.

This alternative responds to the "Healthy Forests Initiative" by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependent communities.

Riparian ecosystems and streamside management zones would be designated, through allocation or standards and guidelines, to provide water-quality protection and improvement. The overall long-term timber product objective would be large-diameter and high-quality sawtimber for species capable of reaching that objective. Highways and roads in the forests, trail and river corridors, view sheds, and recreation-use areas would have forest stands with few, if any, broken views to support enhancements in tourism and local, rural economies. Many insect and disease impacts would be tolerated as part of a functioning natural ecosystem. Most wild and scenic rivers would be recommended for adding to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, with primary emphasis on protecting the resources. Public access via travelways, use corridors, waterways, and trails (including those for off-highway vehicles) would be increased in high-use areas and/or improved to provide for more recreation opportunities.

Table 2- 13. Ridge and Valley – Alt. E Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
4.F.2	236	7.C	2,730
4.I	2,330	7.D	193
5.A	2	7.E.1	17,094
6.A	6,071	8.A.1	2,350
6.E	16,425	8.B	14,291
7.A	2,037	9.H	1,003

Table 2- 14. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt. E Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	833	3.A	7,122	6.A	7,427
1.A	117,976	3.C	23,662	6.B	947
1.B	32,512	3.D	2,450	7.A	4,174
10.B	6,815	4.A	14,313	7.B	31,463
12.A	2,157	4.C	430	7.D	1,627
12.B	2,3266	4.F	45,902	7.E.1	252,250
2.A.1	5,998	4.F.2	4,474	8.A.1	24,141
2.A.2	468	4.H	6,793	8.A.2	4,374
2.A.3	1,551	4.I	6,098	8.B	21,328
2.B.1	5,660	4.J	6,780	9.A.1	8,294
2.B.2	1,026	5.A	114	9.A.3	7,263
2.B.3	5,101	5.D	144		

Table 2- 15. Oconee – Alt. E Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
2.B.2	3,850	6.A	2,604
3.B	9,597	7.D	712
4.B.1	1,005	7.E.1	8,165
4.D	25	7.E.2	5
4.E.1	267	8.A.1	2,622
4.H	6,956	8.B.1	11,026
4.I	844	8.D	30,154
5.A	101	8.D.1	15,874
		9.G	21,403

ALTERNATIVE F – CURRENT MANAGEMENT (THE NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE)

- Provide a balance between market goods, recreation and scenery
- Use of clearcutting will continue to decline; uneven aged management will become the normal silvicultural method used for harvesting
- Temporary use roads will be constructed as the primary road system
- Permanent roads no longer required will be decommissioned
- Recreation will receive increased management
- Dispersed recreation will receive the most emphasis
- SAA-inventoried roadless areas will be recommended either for wilderness, national recreation areas, scenic areas or the 12.A - MRx.
- Increased emphasis will be on non-game species
- Habitats for PETS will be identified, protected, and enhanced

This alternative represents continued use of the 1985 Plan as amended. The Forest would be managed to provide a balance between timber and recreation. Timber production (ASQ) would be, on average, the same as the last ten years. Recreation and wildlife habitat manipulations would receive increased emphasis. All SAA-inventoried roadless areas would be studied for wilderness inclusion. Rivers that meet the inclusion criteria for the Wild and Scenic River system would be placed into a forest management prescription of 4.H (Outstandingly Remarkable Streams.)

Table 2- 16. Ridge and Valley – Alt F Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
10.A	62,550	7.D	215
4.F.2	208	7.E.2	251
7.B	971	99	569

Table 2- 17. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt F Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
1.A	118,258	2.A.2	468	2.A.1	5,998	7.D	2,603
10.A	447,656	2.A.3	1,551	4.D	1,326	7.E.2	7,750
12.A	18,776	3.A	7,116	4.E.1	46	99	1,651
12.B	22,252	3.C	23,470	4.F.2	4,369		
2.A	352	4.A	5,647	7.B	15,643		

Table 2- 18. Oconee – Alt. F Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
10.A	82,429	7.B	936
3.B	9,597	7.D	202
4.B.1	1,007	8.D.1	14,394
4.D	232	99	5,930
4.E.1	70		

ALTERNATIVE G

- Links large undisturbed areas together with corridors
- Provides for threatened and endangered (T&E) management, species reintroduction and watershed restoration
- Emphasizes habitats for forest interior species, as well as habitats for a wide variety of other native plant and animal species, particularly late-successional species
- Nature oriented non-motorized recreation opportunities emphasized
- Roadless areas recommended for wilderness
- High quality timber produced outside the sensitive species habitat, movement corridors and large undisturbed areas
- Effects of native insects and disease would be accepted
- Fire would be used to restore natural ecosystem processes
- Road network would be reduced
- Roadless areas would be maintained as unfragmented habitat

Alternative G would use land allocations to link movement corridors and large undisturbed areas, as well as areas of special effort such as T&E species protection, species reintroduction, and watershed restoration. National Forest System lands would provide habitat for forest interior species and a wide diversity of native plants and animals, particularly late-successional species. Habitats on private lands would be considered. Backcountry, late-successional wildlife species, and nature-oriented nonmotorized recreation opportunities would be emphasized. Most roadless areas would be recommended for wilderness. Old-growth restoration areas would be developed around clusters of existing old growth. Mature forests with old-growth characteristics would provide natural old-growth dynamics across the landscape of the Southern Appalachians. High-quality timber would be produced in long rotations in areas outside forest interior species habitats, movement corridors, and large undisturbed areas, and would be accessed from existing roads. Effects of native insects and diseases would be accepted. Emphasis would be on establishing a naturally resilient forest that would avoid large outbreaks of forest pests. Fire would be used to restore natural ecosystem processes. Road network mileage would be reduced through closure and obliteration of roads not needed for ecosystem stewardship or restoration.

Emphasis would be on inventory, monitoring, conservation, and recovery of proposed, threatened, endangered, sensitive, and locally rare species. Riparian areas would be maintained as old growth for habitat and connectivity. Riparian area protection and restoration would be emphasized through watershed assessments and establishment of riparian conservation areas and reference watersheds. Naturally evolving and naturally appearing landscapes would be pre-dominant. Recreation would take place within a context set by habitat needs and ecosystem function.

This alternative responds to the "Healthy Forests Initiative" by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependent communities.

Semi-primitive wildlife- and nature-oriented recreation opportunities would be emphasized. Developed facilities would be located where they do not detract from ecosystem function and landscape connectivity. Roadless areas would be maintained for unfragmented wildlife habitat, landscape linkages, old-growth restoration, wilderness designation, and other management that would maintain their unfragmented habitat and ecosystem function. Exotic pests would be controlled by means that least impact ecosystem function and unfragmented habitat across the landscape. Eligible rivers would be recommended for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Opportunities to provide for many of the desired conditions such as connected habitats, movement corridors, and large undisturbed areas would be limited in the Piedmont and Coastal Plains due to landownership patterns and red-cockaded woodpecker management needs.

Table 2- 19. Ridge and Valley – Alt. G Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
4.F.2	236	6.D	3,478	7.D	193
4.I	2,117	6.E	6,453	8.A.2	40,413
5.A	2	7.A	2,037	9.H	325
6.A	6,778	7.C	2,730		

Table 2- 20. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt. G Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	77	2.B.2	1,695	4.F	61,151	6.B	23,439
1.A	117,976	2.B.3	5,101	4.F.2	12,929	6.C	66,281
1.B	55,856	3.A	7,122	4.H	6,043	8.A.1	14,279
12.A	7,789	3.C	23,662	4.I	122,080	8.A.2	44,102
2.A.1	5,998	3.D	2,450	4.J	9,244	9.A.1	8,294
2.A.2	468	4.A	14,313	5.A	114	9.A.3	1,405
2.A.3	1,551	4.C	430	5.D	144	9.H	29,700
2.B.1	5,660	4.D	297	6.A	35,281		

Table 2- 21. Oconee – Alt. G Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
2.B.2	7,337	4.I	2,390	7.E.2	5
3.B	9,597	5.A	101	8.A.2	8,153
4.B.1	1,005	6.A	6,040	8.D	30,154
4.D	346	7.D	2,766	8.D.1	15,922
4.E.1	521	7.E.1	5,526	9.G	21,878
4.H	3,469				

ALTERNATIVE I (THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)

- Emphasizes ecosystem restoration and maintenance
- Watershed restoration
- Riparian areas maintained and/or restored
- Sustainability of diverse ecosystems emphasized
- Variety of old growth communities.
- Forest health a priority
- High quality nature-based recreation opportunities.
- Emphasizes non-motorized settings with natural appearing landscapes.
- Road system reduced.

Designed as a 'Rolling Alternative,' Alternative I underwent changes during the period from draft to final publication; however the general intent and emphasis of the alternative did not change. (Refer to the *Changes Between Draft and Final* section of this chapter for specific descriptions of the changes.) Throughout the FEIS, the term Alternative I refers to the modified Alternative I.

This alternative emphasizes the restoration and maintenance of forest ecosystems to provide high-quality water and diverse, resilient, self-reproducing aquatic populations in damaged and undamaged streams. Riparian areas will be managed to retain, restore and/or enhance the inherent ecological processes and functions of the associated aquatic, riparian, and upland components within riparian corridors.

This alternative responds to the "Healthy Forests Initiative" by allowing for the management of forest vegetation and fuels, thus decreasing fuel-loading problems, the risks to other resources and to adjacent private lands, and the potential for severe wildland fires. Prescribed fire would be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire-dependent communities.

Also emphasized will be the sustainability of diverse ecosystems that support viable plant, wildlife, and fish populations, including habitats for those species needing large contiguous forested landscapes. There will be a variety of old growth communities to meet biological and social needs. Forest health will be a priority to ensure a forest that is resistant to large-scale, catastrophic plant mortality from insects or disease, especially from non-native organisms.

This alternative will provide high quality, nature-based recreation opportunities, emphasizing non-motorized settings with natural-appearing landscapes and those landscapes that are not widely available on non-Federal lands. Inventoried roadless areas, outstandingly remarkable river values, and high scenic areas, including scenic views at a range of distances, will be protected.

The Forest Service Road system will be managed at the minimum level needed to implement this alternative and achieve the management objectives of the alternative.

Table 2- 22. Ridge and Valley Alt. I Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
4.D	139	7.A	2,598
4.F.2	236	7.B	629
4.I	5,948	7.E.1	3,646
5.A	3	7.E.2	1,081
5.B	34	9.F	23
6.B	14,723	9.H	35,106
6.D	598		

Table 2- 23. Blue Ridge and Chattooga RD Portion of Piedmont – Alt. I Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	1,929	3.D	2,029	6.B	13,336
1.A	117,430	4.A	16,645	7.A	9,833
1.B	8,094	4.D	3,224	7.B	16,013
12.A	28,260	4.E.1	191	7.E.1	70,712
2.A.1	5,998	4.F	18,129	7.E.2	21,481
2.A.2	468	4.F.1	18,426	8.A.1	68,323
2.A.3	1,551	4.F.2	4,562	8.A.2	23,693
2.B.1	2,120	4.H	17,869	8.E.3	6,604
2.B.2	524	4.I	11,995	9.A.1	9,325
2.B.3	423	5.A	160	9.A.3	17,854
3.A	7,122	5.B	14	9.F	482
3.C	23,660	5.D	144	9.H	137,619

Table 2- 24. Oconee – Alt. I Acres per MRx

MRx	Acres	MRx	Acres
0	142	6.B	1,617
2.B.2	4,854	7.E.1	985
3.B	9,364	7.E.2	8,383
4.B.1	1,005	8.D	31,438
4.D	1,215	8.D.1	15,670
4.E.1	111	9.F	593
4.H	4,730	9.H	35,006
5.A	102		

CONFORMANCE WITH RPA

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations at *36 CFR 219.12(f)(*6) require the Forest Plans to respond to and incorporate the Renewable Resource Planning Act (RPA) Program objectives. The last RPA Program was developed in 1995. Currently the Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision) provides broad overarching national guidance for forest planning and national objectives for the Agency as required by the Government Performance and Results Act. All of the alternatives in this EIS incorporate these broad strategic objectives.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

This section compares the management alternatives from several different perspectives. The acreage allocated to each management prescription for each alternative is shown. The issues identified in Chapter 1 are discussed in detail, and the impact of each alternative on the issue is summarized. It should be noted that, throughout the DEIS, comparative terms such as *more, less, increased,* or *decreased* are typically used to describe the specified parameter relative to the current management plan (Alternative F).

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION ACRES BY ALTERNATIVE

Table 2- 25 shows the Chattahoochee National Forest acres that would be allocated to each management prescription for each alternative. Table 2- 26 provides the same information for the Oconee National Forest.

Table 2- 25. Management Prescription Acres by Alternative – Chattahoochee NF

Chattahoochee NF Management Rx	Alt A	Alt B	Alt D	Alt E	Alt F	Alt G	Alt I
0	2,090	1,123	833	833	0	77	1,929
1.A	118,041	118,059	118,041	117,960	118,242	117,960	117,436
1.B	7,559	17,982	16,123	32,512	0	55,856	8,094
2.A.1	5,998	5,998	5,998	5,998	5,998	5,998	5,998
2.A.2	468	468	468	468	468	468	468
2.A.3	1,551	1,551	1,551	1,551	1,551	1,551	1,551
2.B.1	5,660	5,660	5,660	5,660	0	5,660	2,120
2.B.2	1,135	1,215	3,625	1,026	0	1,695	524
2.B.3	5,101	2,362	5,101	5,101	0	5,101	423
3.A	7,122	7,122	7,122	7,122	7,116	7,122	7,122
3.C	23,676	23,736	23,736	23,662	23,470	23,662	23,660
3.D	2,450	2,450	2,450	2,450	0	2,450	2,029
4.A	14,313	14,313	14,313	14,313	5,646	14,313	16,655
4.C	430	0	430	430	0	430	0
4.D	440	0	0	0	1,326	297	3,363
4.E.1	0	0	0	0	46	0	191
4.F	10,842	1	2,392	45,902	0	61,151	18,129
4.F.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	18,426
4.F.2	4,709	4,709	4,709	4,709	4,577	13,167	4,797
4.H	6,476	9,220	4,021	6,793	0	6,043	17,868
4.I	11,098	6,221	0	8,429	0	124,197	17,943
4.J	0	4,925	2,518	6,780	0	9,244	0
5.A	117	117	117	117	0	117	163
5.B	0	0	0	0	0	0	48
5.D	144	144	144	144	0	144	144
6.A	13,209	14,050	20,108	13,498	0	42,059	0
6.B	947	12,253	316	947	0	23,498	28,059
6.C	0	0	9,971	0	0	66,283	0
6.D	13,467	0	14,713	0	0	3,478	598

Table continued next page.

Chattahoochee NF Management Rx	Alt A	Alt B	Alt D	Alt E	Alt F	Alt G	Alt I
6.E	0	0	0	16,508	0	7,338	0
7.A	55,303	0	22,926	4,174	0	0	12,431
7.B	21,097	0	10,162	31,463	16,614	0	16,586
7.C	16,246	0	6,255	2,730	0	2,730	0
7.D	3,176	193	4,424	1,820	2,818	193	0
7.E.1	62,127	2,518	4,027	271,304	8,001	0	74,277
7.E.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	22,455
8.A.1	33,588	186,459	164	26,549	0	14,279	68,323
8.A.2	9,945	62,403	15,353	4,374	0	85,668	23,693
8.B	13,764	17,266	0	35,619	0	0	0
8.E.1	0	2,556	0	0	0	0	0
8.E.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6,604
9.A.1	8,294	8,294	8,295	8,294	0	8,294	9,325
9.A.3	7,898	18,516	0	7,263	0	1,405	17,854
9.F	0	0	0	0	0	0	505
9.H	3,034	197,725	13,465	1,002	0	30,026	172,718
10.A	0	135	191,520	0	510,851	0	0
10.B	198,479	0	138,337	6,815	0	0	0
10.E	15,187	0	68,658	0	0	0	0
12.A	42,312	0	0	2,157	18,776	7,789	28,261
12.B	2,251	0	1,699	23,266	22,252	0	0
99 (recently acquired or unallocated)	0	0	0	0	3,018	0	0
TOTAL	**749,744**	**749,744**	**749,745**	**749,743**	***750,770**	**749,743**	***750,770**

**Totals for Alternatives F and I reflect Lands staff ownership records as of September, 2003.*

Table 2- 26. Management Prescription Acres by Alternative – Oconee NF

Oconee NF Management Rx	Alt A	Alt B	Alt D	Alt E	Alt F	Alt G	Alt I
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	142
2.B.2	5,276	3,850	10,806	2,850	0	7,337	4,854
3.B	4,638	4,638	4,638	4,638	4,638	4,638	9,364
4.B	1,005	1,005	1,005	1,005	0	1,005	0
4.B.1	0	0	0	0	1,007	0	1,005
4.D	346	25	25	25	232	346	1,215
4.E.1	353	1,152	353	267	70	521	111
4.G.1	4,959	4,959	4,959	4,959	5,372	4,959	0
4.H	5,530	6,956	0	6,956	0	3,469	4,730
4.I	0	844	0	844	0	2,390	0
5.A	101	101	101	101	0	101	102
6.A	0	0	0	2,604	0	6,040	0
6.B	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,617
7.B	0	0	0	0	936	0	0
7.C	1,978	0	0	0	0	0	0
7.D	1,530	1,530	1,438	712	202	2,766	0
7.E.1	0	0	0	8,165	0	5,526	985
7.E.2	5	5	5	5	0	5	8,383
8.A.1	0	0	0	2,622	0	0	0
8.A.2	0	0	0	0	0	8,153	0
8.B.1	0	0	0	11,026	0	0	0
8.D	30,154	30,154	30,743	30,154	0	30,154	31,438
8.D.1	15,922	15,874	15,922	15,874	14,394	15,922	15,670
9.F	0	0	0	0	0	0	593
9.G	26,082	25,946	26,671	21,403	0	21,878	0
9.H	0	18,171	0	0	0	0	35,006
10.A	17,331	0	18,544	0	82,429	0	0
99 (recently acquired or unallocated)	0	0	0	0	5,930	0	0
TOTAL	**115,210**	**115,210**	**115,210**	**114,210**	**115,210**	**115,210**	**115,215**

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES BY ISSUE

In this section, the issues identified in Chapter 1 are explained in more detail. Public comments and Forest Service concerns are summarized. This section also compares the ways the alternatives address each issue.

Issue 1 - Terrestrial Plants and Animals and Their Associated Habitats

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Maintain or increase habitats for those species needing large, contiguous forested landscapes where the management of National Forest lands can make a difference in their populations and viability.

- Provide habitat conditions necessary to maintain viable populations of all species native to the planning area, and to support desirable levels of selected species (e.g., species with special habitat needs, locally rare species, species commonly trapped/hunted, or species of special interest).

Public comments reflect a broad array of interests and concerns revolving around "biodiversity." This term broadly refers to the distribution, variety, and abundance of plant and animal communities, ecosystems, and individual species. Some people feel that biodiversity objectives need to be achieved through active multiple-use management, while others feel that biodiversity can only be achieved through passive management emphasizing "natural" processes.

Table 2- 27 and Table 2- 28 show the comparison of Issue 1 by alternatives. These tables show the effect of each alternative on various types of habitats for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests. Management Indicator Species (MIS) are also identified.

Table 2- 27. Issue 1 – Terrestrial Plants and Animals and Their Associated Habitats – Chattahoochee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Successional Forest Habitats	**Percent of Forested Acres**						
Early Successional Habitat – 1st Decade	4.3	5.7	7.0	4.3	7.8	3.2	4.4
Early Successional Habitat – 5th Decade	2.2	3.0	4.4	0.6	5.5	0.4	2.7
Mid- to Late-Successional Habitat – 1st Decade	82.6	80.7	79.5	83.4	77.8	84.5	82.3
Mid- to Late-Successional Habitat – 5th Decade	86.4	82.5	78.8	95.2	71.5	95.4	86.4
Late Successional Habitat – 1st Decade	49.0	47.2	46.8	49.8	44.8	50.9	48.8
Late Successional Habitat – 5th Decade	72.3	67.6	63.6	79.9	57.5	80.2	72.0
	Acres in Thousands per Decade						
Acres Maintained in high-elevation early-successional habitat	3.2	4.3	4.3	1.9	1.5	3.3	3.2
	Percent of Forested Acres						
Mid- to Late-Successional Mesic Deciduous Forests in a Landscape with Greater than 70% Cover	53	53	53	53	53	53	53
Mid- to Late-Successional Mesic Deciduous Forests Allocated to Mgt. Prescriptions with an Early-Successional Habitat Objective of greater than 4%.	29.9	46.3	44.3	6.4	57.9	4.1	25.6
Permanent Openings, Old Fields and Balds	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres in Mgt. Pres. Allowing New Permanent Openings	534.6	524.1	527.8	491.1	594.6	269.2	518.8
MIS – Community Indicators	**Trends**						
Prairie Warbler (Early Successional Habitat)							
1st Decade	+	+	++	+	++	+	+
5th Decade	=	+	+	–	+	–	+
Ovenbird (Forest Interior)							
1st Decade	=	=	–	=	–	=	=
5th Decade	+	=	–	++	– –	++	+
Pileated Woodpecker (Snags)							
1st Decade	=	=	–	=	–	=	=
5th Decade	++	+	+	++	+	++	++
Scarlet Tanager (Oak Forests)							
1st Decade	=	=	–	=	–	=	=
5th Decade	+	=	–	++	– –	++	+
Hooded Warbler (Mid to Late Successional Deciduous Forest)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th decade	++	++	+	++	+	++	++
Chestnut-sided Warbler (High Elevation Early Successional Habitats)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	–	+	+
5th decade	+	+	+	+	–	+	+

Table continued next page.

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Pine Warbler (Pine Pine-Oak Habitats)							
1st decade	=	=	=	=	–	=	=
5th decade	=	=	–	–	–	–	=
Acadian Flycatcher (Mid-Late Successional (Riparian Habitats)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th decade	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Field Sparrow (woodland, savanna and grassland communities)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th decade	+	+	+	+	–	+	+
MIS – TES SPECIES							
Smooth Coneflower(Effects of management on recovery)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th decade	++	++	++	++	+	++	++

Table 2- 28. Issue 1 - Terrestrial Plants and Animals and Their Associated Habitats – Oconee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Successional Forest Habitats	**Percent of Forested Acres**						
Early Successional Habitat – 1st Decade	7.0	5.7	14.1	5.8	18.5	5.7	5.7
Early Successional Habitat – 5th Decade	7.5	4.6	7.2	7.0	18.1	6.5	4.7
Mid- to Late-Successional Habitat – 1st Decade	62.8	64.1	55.2	64.0	52.2	64.2	64.3
Mid- to Late-Successional Habitat – 5th Decade	69.1	72.4	74.1	72.5	56.2	78.4	70.9
Late Successional Habitat – 1st Decade	16.4	16.7	16.3	16.7	16.9	16.7	16.4
Late Successional Habitat – 5th Decade	34.5	37.5	37.8	38.0	36.3	43.5	36.7
	Acres in Thousands						
Acres Maintained in high-elevation early-successional habitat	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Percent of Forested Acres						
Mid- to Late-Successional Mesic Deciduous Forests in a Landscape with Greater than 70% Cover	24.7	24.7	24.7	24.7	24.7	24.7	24.7
Mid- to Late-Successional Mesic Deciduous Forests Allocated to Mgt. Prescriptions with an Early-Successional Habitat Objective of greater than 4%.	85.8	82.9	85.3	74.7	90.7	85.8	75.9
Permanent Openings, Old Fields and Balds	Acres in Thousands						
Acres in Mgt. Pres. Allowing New Permanent Openings	108.5	109.4	103.3	107.8	113.9	98.0	105.6

Table continued next page.

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
MIS – Community Indicators	**Trends**						
Prairie Warbler (Early Successional Habitat)							
1st Decade	+	=	++	=	++	=	=
5th Decade	+	–	+	+	++	+	–
Wood Thrush (Forest Interior)							
1st Decade	–	=	––	=	––	=	=
5th Decade	+	+	+	+	–	++	+
Pileated Woodpecker (Snags)							
1st Decade	=	=	=	=	=	=	=
5th Decade	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Scarlet Tanager (Oak Forest)							
1st Decade	–	–	––	–	––	–	–
5th Decade	++	++	++	++	––	++	++
Hooded Warbler (Mid to Late Successional Deciduous Forest)							
1st decade	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
5th decade	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Pine Warbler (Pine Pine-Oak Habitats)							
1st decade	=	=	–	=	–	=	=
5th decade	+	+	+	=	–	+	+
Swainson Warbler (Early Successional Riparian Habitats)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	=	+	+
5th decade	++	++	++	++	+	++	++
Acadian Flycatcher (Mid-Late Successional Riparian Habitats)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th decade	++	++	++	++	++	++	++
Field Sparrow (woodland, savanna and grassland communities)							
1st decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th decade	+	+	+	+	-	+	+

Source: Analysis in Chapter 3, FEIS

*Population trends expressed as expected change from current levels:
++ = relatively large increase
+ = increase
= = little to no change
– = decrease
–– = relatively large decrease

Issue 2 - Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive/Locally Rare Species

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Conserve and recover threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and their habitats.

The national forests of the Southern Appalachians provide potential and occupied habitat for numerous threatened and endangered species. Legal mandates require national forests to maintain populations of proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive (PETS) species as important components of diverse, functional ecosystems. Forest Plan revisions need to identify actions required to manage habitats for these species. Forest Plan revisions also must include habitat objectives needed to protect existing species and habitats, and implement recovery objectives that have been established for threatened and endangered species by the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service. The challenge lies in determining what and how much habitat management is needed to increase populations of PETS. There may also be opportunities to restore habitat conditions that may allow for the reintroduction of particular species.

Management strategies for PETS species become complex in light of the factors previously mentioned and because of the scale questions that affect the national forests. The range of some species covers multiple forests, and their management strategies will need to be coordinated between forests. Other species occur only on the periphery of National Forest System lands and actions taken on national forest lands will only minimally influence their recovery. In the case of aquatic species, despite conservation measures taken on public lands, activities that occur on other ownerships within a watershed may prevent improvement of habitat quality and expansion of suitable habitat. Most comments supported PETS management and/or recovery.

Concerns have also been expressed for those species that are “locally rare.” These are species that are not “rare” within their biological range but are “rare” on a national forest or in a particular state. Concerns about how these species and their habitats will be managed will involve coordination with state natural heritage programs and state wildlife agencies.

Table 2- 29 and Table 2- 30 show the comparison of Issue 2 by alternatives. These tables show the number of species/habitat relationships in each risk category under the various alternatives.

Table 2- 29. Issue 2 – Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive/Locally Rare Species – Chattahoochee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Terrestrial Species Status Categories	**Number of Species/Habitat Relationships**						
Species/Habitat Relationships Rated as Very High Risk	60	57	57	89	85	89	60
Species/Habitat Relationships Rated as High Risk	107	110	110	98	96	98	107
Species/Habitat Relationships Rated as Moderately High Risk	146	146	146	137	141	137	146
Total	313	313	313	324	322	324	313
Aquatic Species Viability (TES only)	**Number of Species/Number of Watersheds**						
Low Risk	28/16	28/16	28/16	28/16	28/16	28/16	28/16
Moderate Risk, FS May Positively Influence	15/14	15/14	15/14	15/14	15/14	15/14	15/14
Potential High Risk, Little Opportunity for FS Influence	18/12	18/12	18/12	18/12	18/12	18/12	18/12
Potential High Risk, FS May Positively Influence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Potential Very High Risk, Little Opportunity for FS Influence	9/6	9/6	9/6	9/6	9/6	9/6	9/6

Table 2- 30. Issue 2 - Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive/Locally Rare Species – Oconee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Terrestrial Species Status Categories	**Number of Species/Habitat Relationships**						
Species/Habitat Relationships Rated as Very High Risk	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Species/Habitat Relationships Rated as High Risk	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Species/Habitat Relationships Rated as Moderately High Risk	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
Total	19	19	19	20	20	20	19
Aquatic Species Viability (TES only)	**Number of Species/Number of Watersheds**						
Low Risk	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6
Moderate Risk, FS May Positively Influence	4/5	4/5	4/5	4/5	4/5	4/5	4/5
Potential High Risk, Little Opportunity for FS Influence	2/4	2/4	2/4	2/4	2/4	2/4	2/4
Potential High Risk, FS May Positively Influence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Potential Very High Risk, Little Opportunity for FS Influence	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MIS – TES Species	**Trends**						
RCW (mid- and late-successional pine and pine-oak forest communities)							
1st decade	=	=	=	=	–	=	=
2nd decade	+	+	+	+	–	+	+

Issue 3 - Old Growth

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Manage a variety of large, medium, and small old growth patches (through restoration, protection, or maintenance activities) to meet biological and social needs. These patches could include stands of either "existing old growth" or "future old growth".

The public has expressed concerns and a variety of viewpoints about old-growth forests on public lands. Some concerns expressed reflect the need for more of a focus on old growth than what is included in existing Forest Plans. Others have commented that the spatial distribution and linkages of patches with varying sizes are important, that old-growth communities are under-represented on private lands, and that the national forests have the best opportunity to provide for these communities. Comments have also been made that old-growth communities are currently underrepresented on the national forests as well, and that timber harvest activities will reduce them further. Others, however, state that “protecting” old growth is an inappropriate underutilization of resources - that old growth is adequately represented and protected in current forest plans through wilderness, lands identified as unsuitable for timber production, and by relatively low harvest levels and long rotations on lands allocated for wood production.

There are many values that people associate with old growth, some of which are compatible, and others that present conflict. Old growth provides both biological and social values. Old-growth communities provide large den trees for wildlife species such as black bear, large snags for birds and cavity nesters, and large cover logs for other wildlife. Ecologically, old growth provides elements for biologic richness, gene conservation, and riparian area enhancement. Old-growth areas provide for certain recreational experiences, research opportunities, and educational study. Other areas have associated historical, cultural, and spiritual values. On the other hand, old-growth areas are a source of large-diameter, high-value hardwoods, which are limited in supply and in high demand. Some expressed the view that each old-growth community type provides its own unique set of values.

There is also a debate about how old growth should be managed, maintained, or restored. Many people state that old-growth areas should be protected or “preserved” and that there should be no harvesting within these areas. Another view is that old growth should be a self-perpetuating state where human intervention is unnecessary. Some expressed a concept of different levels of old-growth management, including undisturbed “core” areas with more actively managed “buffers” of old growth around them. Others say that insect and disease risk can be relatively high in old-growth stands and could (for some community types) threaten the retention of those stands as old growth. There is concern that fire exclusion could favor a buildup of fire-intolerant, but shade-tolerant, species that could eventually replace the original old-growth type. This view is that active management, including timber harvest and prescribed fire, could be used to accelerate the development of

old-growth attributes. Given the dynamic nature of forests, some believe there is a need to plan for replacement of old growth. Others have expressed concern about fragmentation of old growth that might result from moving old growth around and not having designated old-growth areas. Some expressed concerns about costs of managing old growth and the possibility of reduced wood production and timber values.

Table 2- 31 and Table 2- 32 show the comparison of Issue 3 by alternatives for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests. These tables show the acreage of existing old growth as well as the acreage in management prescriptions designed to foster old growth development. The term "future old growth" refers to forest stands or patches allocated to old growth through land management decisions, but which do not meet all the criteria in the operational definition of old growth forest.

Table 2- 31. Issue 3 – Old Growth – Chattahoochee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Old Growth	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres of Allocated Old Growth (Rx 6's)	27.5	25.8	44.6	30.9	0	140.6	28.7
Total Acres Future Old Growth	168.6	176.4	195.4	195.4	126.1	328.7	169.3

Table 2- 32. Issue 3 - Old Growth – Oconee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Old Growth	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres of Allocated Old Growth (Rx 6's)	0	0	0	2.6	0	6.0	2.2
Total Acres Future Old Growth	6.7	4.9	11.8	6.5	1.0	14.4	7.8

Source: Planning GIS stands data layer, extracted and modified from CISC data as of Sept. 2003.

Issue 4 - Riparian Area Management, Water Quality, and Aquatic Habitats

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Manage watersheds (and where necessary restore them) to provide resilient and stable conditions to ensure the quality and quantity of water necessary to protect ecological functions and support intended beneficial water uses
- Manage riparian ecosystems, wetlands and aquatic systems (and where necessary restore them) to protect and maintain their soil, water, vegetation, fish and wildlife associated resources

Water is often referred to as our most precious resource. Although water supplies in the South are generally abundant, expanding urbanization and development are creating increased demands and impacts on the waters of the South. According to the Southern Appalachian Assessment, two-thirds of reported water quality impacts are due to non-point sources. Soil erosion and stream sedimentation—as well as nutrient, chemical, and bacterial contamination—can result directly or indirectly from land uses. Beneficial uses of water are often undesirably affected by water quality degradation created by land uses.

The Southern Appalachian Assessment also indicates that forestry has a low potential for impact on aquatic resources and that urban development and mining have caused the largest alterations in waters of the region. However, it also points out that the impacts on water are greatest for land uses and activities near streams. (Some examples of this include overused campsites, and lack of maintenance on roads and trails.) Water quality impacts also increase with the proportion of a watershed that is disturbed.

National Forests were originally established, in part, to secure favorable water flows. The 1972 Clean Water Act requires states to establish water quality standards for streams and water bodies, including designation of beneficial uses, criteria to protect these beneficial uses, and an antidegradation policy. The Forest Service must meet, or exceed, these State procedural and substantive requirements for water quality on the National Forests. National Forest management should protect the beneficial uses, namely cold water, cool water, or warm water fisheries; recreation and public water supplies; habitats for other indigenous aquatic life; and aquatic PETS species.

Some people have expressed concern about national forest management effects on water quality, health of riparian areas, and the associated aquatic habitats. Some are concerned about the effects of timber harvesting, recreational uses, and road management on water and in-stream habitats. Streamside protection measures, harvesting practices, in-stream habitat management, and water quality monitoring methods in the existing LMP have been reevaluated and revised to be responsive to watershed conditions and need for change. There are also concerns about off-forest effects on the water quality and aquatic habitats within the national forests. In some cases, water quality and aquatic protection and improvement would require the

support and cooperation of the public, industry, or neighbors within a watershed, depending on prevalent land uses.

Riparian areas have value to many users for a variety of purposes. Habitats for a multitude of plant and animal species and most of the highest valued recreation sites reside in the riparian areas. Riparian areas are often the most productive sites for growing high-quality wood products. Competition for this "rich" resource is strong, making the issue an important one to almost every user group, visitor, and manager. This issue also relates to an area that was emphasized in the 1995 Draft RPA.

Riparian areas cannot be managed as an isolated resource. Given the interrelated nature of riparian, aquatic and upland ecosystems, the effects of most forms of management will need to be examined within the context of entire watersheds. The revised LMP provides direction for the management of riparian areas through MRx 11, Riparian Corridors. This prescription is allocated to perennial and intermittent streams on both Forests. Direction addresses how recreation pursuits of many types, wildlife habitat treatments, timber harvesting, road management and prescribed fire can occur within these areas in ways that will not impair aquatic and riparian ecosystems. The LMP will ensure that the appropriate standards are in place to meet or exceed State water quality standards, and Best Management Practices.

One of the pollutants of concern is sediment, produced by land-disturbing activities along with natural events such as floods or landslides. Levels of sedimentation before mitigation for each alternative were assessed to complete cumulative effects analysis for water quality and associated beneficial uses on forested lands. Sedimentation was assessed by modeling the percent increase in sedimentation from National Forest management activities beyond the current land use/cover conditions. Sediment has the potential to impact functions and conditions of riparian areas and streams. Implementing Best Management Practices, and minimizing actions within the Riparian Corridor mitigate the impact of sediment produced by Forest Service activities.

Table 2- 33 displays the average percent increase in sediment yields from FS activities over existing levels across all 43 watersheds on the Forests. This table also shows the summed acres by alternative allocated to watershed management prescription 9.A.1. (source water protection), and 9.A.3. (watershed restoration areas

Table 2- 33. Issue 4 – Riparian Area Management, Water Quality, and Aquatic Habitats

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Soil and Water	**Percent Increase**						
Average Percent Increase in Sediment Yields from FS Activities over Existing Levels Across 43 Watersheds	1.4	2.5	2.2	0.6	3.5	0.3	1.5
Acres in Watershed Management Prescriptions	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres Allocated to MRx 9.A.1 and 9.A.3	16.2	26.8	8.3	15.6	0	9.7	27.2

Issue 5 – Wood Products

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to accomplish the following:

- Where forest management activities are needed and appropriate to achieve the desired composition, structure, and function of forest ecosystems, a result of such activities will also be to provide a sustainable supply of wood products for local needs

- Provide supplies of those wood products where the Forest Service is in a unique position to make an impact on meeting the demand for those products

Some of those who commented expressed a strong feeling that national forests are public lands that should be set aside, either for providing forest-related values other than timber, or as a reserve of timber. Others have similarly strong views of the purpose of national forests as primarily a support for local or regional wood processing facilities and their contribution to the local economies; as a place where there should be an emphasis on utilizing the current forest growth capabilities; or as a place where there is a community-based balance between wood production and recreation benefits. Still others see that the values they are concerned with, such as wildlife game species, can be best provided through habitat manipulation that includes the production of wood products. With recent policy changes of the Forest Service toward more ecology-based management, some people question whether the wood product role of national forests has changed. Others point out that the national forests still need to be managed to provide for multiple uses, including wood products.

Considerable concern has been expressed about where sustained-yield production of wood products should occur. Should there be any removal of wood products from certain areas, such as riparian zones, wetlands, special areas or unique habitats? Some say that timber harvesting is not needed in all areas, and that it causes too much damage to the environment. Others say that the concerns about production of wood products can be dealt with through plan standards and guidelines, and implementing that production as a part of a set of multiple use objectives; therefore, most areas should be kept available.

Other concerns were expressed about how much production of wood products should be expected from National Forest System lands. Some express the need to adapt the production level (ASQ) objectives to the demands of the local or market area. Product sizes and mixes are sometimes a concern to local wood product consuming industries. Others are also looking more to the South as a source of wood products nationally, given the decreased availability in other regions of the country. Additionally, the national forests in the Southern Appalachians hold a large share of the high-grade oak sawtimber and other high-quality hardwoods, which are in short supply but high demand.

Some people felt that there is a conflict between production of wood products from public lands and the wood market opportunities for private landowners. Others are concerned that reduced production of wood products will lead to "unhealthy" aging of the national forests with increased pest problems that could affect both public and private lands. Some regard production of wood products as a way to lower insect and disease risk and fire hazards. Others see opportunities to utilize trees being killed by insects and disease outbreaks. Still others are concerned that any production levels will cause conflicts, and that if any wood products are produced they should be by-products of meeting other management needs. Some people question any wood product removal from national forests.

Concerns are often expressed about the regeneration methods used to produce the wood products (e.g., clear cutting and single tree selection). Many people have commented that wood products should be removed only if it is done without requiring construction of new roads. Some have expressed concerns about the environmental effects of forest type conversion from hardwood to pine, and the size of harvest areas and frequency of harvests.

The Forest Plan revisions need to determine what lands will be suitable for sustained yield of wood products. This determination of suitable forestlands includes using the production of wood products as a means to achieve Forest Plan resource objectives in a way that considers cost-effectiveness and economic efficiency.

Table 2- 34 shows the comparison of Issue 5 by alternatives. This table shows the acreage classified as suitable for timber production and the projected quantities for each alternative.

Table 2- 34. Issue 5 – Wood Products

Alternative Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Timber Management	**Acres in Thousands**						
Land Classified as Suitable for Timber Production	479	580	576	208	633	223	461
	Volume in MMCF and MMBF						
Allowable Sale Quantity	First Decade						
MMCF	80	150	220	40	230	10	90
MMBF	440	830	1110	220	1260	40	500
Timber Sale Program Quantity	Total First Decade						
MMCF	114	166	235	118	267	48	128
MMBF	627	913	1293	649	1468	264	704
Timber Sale Program Quantity	Total Fifth Decade						
MMCF	194	206	235	148	297	118	198
MMBF	1067	1133	1292	814	1633	649	1089

Issue 6 - Aesthetics/Scenery Management

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Protect and enhance the scenic and aesthetic values of the lands in the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests

- Manage the National Forests to provide a variety of Landscape Character Themes with the predominant themes being Natural Appearing, Natural Evolving, and variations of these themes

During the planning period, some people pointed out that natural-appearing landscapes of high-quality scenery are one of the main reasons tourists and people seeking recreation come to the Southern Appalachians. Scenic landscapes help to determine the success of recreation and tourism. Opinions vary as to the existing scenic condition. Some see the need for enhancement, restoration, and for increased opportunities to provide older and larger trees. Some think that a predominantly natural-appearing, non-industrial-looking forest landscape character should be emphasized; and that certain areas of the national forests—such as travel and trail corridors, important view sheds, and other places with recreation use—should provide a higher level of scenery. Some people also commented that management for hardwoods should be increased because hardwoods tend to enhance the scenic quality of an area.

Another concern is with the increasing levels of private development on the edges of the national forests and the desires of these private landowners for high-quality scenery on the adjacent National Forest System lands.

Comments were made that public preferences for scenic quality should be evaluated and that aesthetic (scenic integrity) objectives should be established. Some feel that the existing Forest Plan allows for too much scenic degradation. To them the high visual impact management practices and uses - such as clear cutting and the building of roads, power lines, and electronic sites - are too evident. Some suggested that selecting low-impact practices and emulating natural processes would better manage the scenery of the national forests. Others mentioned that while harvesting wood products does tend to cause a visual disruption, this effect is only temporary, and that the harvest method used should be whatever is needed to meet resource objectives. Some commented that scenic quality could be restored through the use of salvage timber harvesting following disturbances like fires and insect outbreaks. Others said that the Forest Service should identify and implement methods that will reduce the visual impact of timber harvest so that harvesting can continue to be used as a management tool.

Table 2- 35 and Table 2- 36 show the comparison of Issue 6 by alternatives. These tables show scenic integrity objectives under the various alternatives.

Table 2- 35. Issue 6 – Aesthetics/Scenery Management – Chattahoochee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Scenic Integrity Objectives	**Percent of Total Forest Acres**						
Very High	23%	23%	23%	32%	20%	41%	26%
High	36%	34%	32%	27%	32%	43%	33%
Moderate	34%	33%	36%	39%	35%	15%	33%
Low	7%	10%	9%	2%	12%	1%	8%
Very Low	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Table 2- 36. Issue 6 – Aesthetics/Scenery Management – Oconee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Scenic Integrity Objectives	**Percent of Total Forest Acres**						
Very High	1%	2%	1%	4%	1%	2%	2%
High	30%	28%	35%	28%	28%	39%	30%
Moderate	56%	58%	52%	57%	56%	48%	57%
Low	12%	12%	12%	11%	13%	10%	11%
Very Low	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Issue 7 - Recreation Opportunities/Experiences

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities which are not widely available on non-Federal lands.

- Meet the following recreation needs within the capabilities of the land:
    - Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail systems, especially in non-motorized settings with high quality landscapes. (Provide separate-use trails where necessary to reduce user conflicts or to improve the quality of recreation experiences.)
    - Designated OHV routes (which will occur primarily in RN1 settings).
    - The high priority improvements, expansions, or additions of facilities providing developed recreation opportunities.
    - Hunting, fishing, and non-consumptive wildlife opportunities.
    - Improved interpretive opportunities or other special recreation needs locally identified.
- Manage areas to provide for the "backcountry" (semi-primitive/remote) recreation experiences that are not available on other land ownerships

- Focus on providing those recreation opportunities which are unique or of exceptional long-term value in a manner that focuses on maximizing visitor satisfaction within financial and environmental limitations. Although the opportunities for outdoor recreation are extensive, and the public demand for these opportunities is seemingly endless, the Forest's capability to meet these demands is neither static nor endless. Visitor preferences can shift over time, and both changing financial limitations and environmental impacts must be considered.

- 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 sound and financially sustainable basis. Adapt management of recreation facilities and opportunities as needed to shift limited resources to those opportunities.

People are using trails today for much more than backpacking. Mountain biking, horseback riding, and off-highway vehicles are all popular on national forest trails. Due to the limited sources of supply, these trails are often congested and have become sources of conflict between users. In many cases, there is a strong interest in increasing the trail networks for all these uses. Increases in the trail miles would increase trail use opportunities and reduce the congestion on existing trails. The challenge would be developing a trail system that recognizes conflicting uses and minimizes resource damage. Of particular concern is a policy for managing OHV use. Trails of national interest and trail systems that connect adjacent national forests (e.g., the Appalachian Trail) require coordinated management direction.

Congestion in recreation use tends to occur on the shores of lakes and streams because these settings are in high demand. Some users are concerned with the lack of trailhead facilities. In those areas where developed sites and recreation facilities are congested, and the facilities and the resources are being damaged from overuse, opportunities for providing additional facilities need to be explored. Comments were made that the Forest Service should emphasize providing for recreational opportunities that are not generally available on private land. Other comments have been made to the effect that before the Forest Service builds new facilities, there should be an emphasis on maintaining and upgrading the existing facilities.

For some people, the quality of the recreation experience often goes down as the number of users goes up. Additional user control may become necessary to limit the number of people in overcrowded areas or in biologically sensitive areas. Some people are also concerned that timber harvesting activities or concentrated recreational use may result in a reduction of habitats for various game species, or a reduction in water quality that will affect fishing opportunities. Others feel that timber harvesting has a beneficial effect on game species.

Table 2- 37 shows the comparison of Issue 7 by alternatives. This table shows the emphasis on different types of recreation opportunities across the various alternatives for the Chattahoochee and Oconee National Forests.

Table 2- 37. Issue 7 – Recreation Opportunities/Experiences

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Recreation Opportunity Spectrum	**Acres in Thousands**						
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized	61	56	79	85	100	71	86
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized managed as Primitive (1.A, 1.B, 2.A.1)	132	142	140	156	124	180	132
Semi-Primitive Motorized	7	7	13	10	14	9	10
Roaded Natural	666	661	634	615	628	606	638
Rural/Urban	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Recreation Management Allocations	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres with a Recreation Emphasis (Rx 7 series)	161	4	49	320	29	11	135
Acres with a Backcountry Recreation Emphasis (Rx 12 series)	45	0	2	25	41	8	28
Developed/Dispersed Recreation	**Degree of Increase**						
Estimated Increase in Capacity of Developed Recreation Areas	**Low**	**Mod**	**High**	**Low**	**N/A**	**Mod**	**Low**
Estimated Increase in Non-Motorized Trails	**Mod**	**Low**	**Low**	**High**	**N/A**	**Low**	**Low**
Off-Highway Vehicle Roads and Trails	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres of Off-Highway Vehicle Use Areas (Rx 7C)	**18**	**0**	**6**	**3**	**0**	**3**	**0**
	Increase or Decrease						
Estimated Change in Motorized Roads and Trails	Inc.	Dec.	Dec.	Inc.	N/A	Dec.	Dec.
MIS – Demand Species	**Trends**						
Chattahoochee National Forest							
White-tailed Deer							
1st Decade	+	+	=	=	+	-	+
5th Decade	+	+	=	-	+	-	+
Black Bear							
1st Decade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
5th Decade	++	+	+	+	+	+	++
Oconee National Forest							
White-tailed Deer							
1st Decade	+	=	+	=	+	=	=
5th Decade	+	=	+	+	+	=	=

Issue 8 - Roadless Areas and Wilderness Management

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Manage wilderness, roadless and other unroaded areas to provide their full range of social and ecological benefits.

The sufficiency of the existing wilderness areas continues to be debated. A wide spectrum of feelings and values for more, less, or the same exists among the national forests' community of interests. Various alternatives in the Forest Plan revisions should consider recommending some, all, or none of the roadless areas to Congress for wilderness designation.

Some people have indicated that all Southern Appalachian Assessment (SAA) roadless areas should be recommended for wilderness designation, while others have expressed that there is enough wilderness already and that the roadless areas should be managed to achieve other resource objectives. Comments have been received that all the areas identified in the Wilderness Society's *Georgia Mountain Treasures* should be recommended for either wilderness or some special area designation.

People have expressed concern over the fate of any roadless areas not recommended for wilderness. Some have proposed that these areas be managed to mitigate habitat fragmentation, increase scenic areas, or provide a "remote" or "semi-primitive non-motorized" recreation experience. Others feel that an area does not have to be labeled as "roadless" or "wilderness" in order to provide biological diversity. They feel that in order to provide high-quality wildlife habitat, different types of disturbances are needed in order to create a variety of successional stages. Others would like to see the lands in roadless areas available for timber production.

Comments were received that, even if certain areas do not meet the criteria for inclusion in the roadless area inventory, these areas should still be considered for inclusion in the wilderness system. Some comments indicated that the Forest Service should consider obliterating roads within Forest Service jurisdiction in order to "create" areas that would then meet the criteria for inclusion in the roadless area inventory.

For areas that are already congressionally designated as wilderness, concerns have been expressed about how they are managed. The recommendation of any new areas to the wilderness system may also have an impact on the way any existing wilderness areas that are nearby are managed. These wilderness management concerns include patterns and intensities of uses, insect and disease management, fire management including the use of more management-prescribed fire, incorporating limits-of-acceptable change concepts into plan direction, and the mitigation of air pollution effects on wilderness resources. Existing wilderness standards need to be reviewed to see if they are effective in achieving the desired

future conditions of wilderness resources. Management direction for existing Designated Wilderness Areas will not vary by alternative.

Table 2- 38 and Table 2- 39 show the comparison of Issue 8 by alternative. Table 2-38 shows the acreage of existing, wilderness, wilderness study areas (WSAs), and areas maintained in a roadless character condition. Table 2- 39 specifies the roadless areas to be recommended for wilderness study areas under each alternative.

Table 2- 38. Issue 8 – Roadless Areas and Wilderness Management – Allocations

Alternative/Units Of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Wilderness/Roadless	Acres in Thousands						
Acres of Existing Wilderness	117	117	117	117	117	117	117
Recommended for Designation as WSAs	6.6	19.9	9.5	29.2	0	54.8	8.1
Roadless Character Maintained	40.6	9.2	23.5	35	64.8	10.0	64.8

Table 2- 39. Issue 8 – Roadless Areas and Wilderness Management – Management Direction and Recommended Study Areas

Alt.	Management Direction
A	Recreation opportunities and enhanced goods and services emphasized to local economies. SAA roadless suggested for wilderness: Ken Mountain; Foster Branch; Duck Branch; Wilson Cove; Ben Gap; Shoal Creek; and Ellicott Rock.
B	Old Growth emphasized; scenic qualities would be enhanced; roadless areas with high value wildlife needs would not be recommended to wilderness. SAA roadless suggested for wilderness: Ken Mountain; Foster Branch; Duck Branch; Wilson Cove; Ben Gap; Shoal Creek; Ellicott Rock extension; Miller Creek; Helton Creek; Turner Creek; Tate Branch; Patterson Gap; Joe Gap; and Big Mountain.
D	Old Growth provided on unsuitable land. SAA roadless suggested for wilderness: Ken Mountain; Shoal Creek; Tate Branch; Patterson Gap; Joe Gap; and Sarah's Creek.
E	Large blocks of forest maintained in roadless condition to provide remote backcountry recreation. SAA roadless suggested for wilderness: Ken Mountain; Foster Branch; Duck Branch; Wilson Cove; Ben Gap; Shoal Creek; Ellicott Rock extension; Miller Creek; Turner Creek; Tate Branch; Sarah's Creek, Indian Grave Gap; Ellicott Rock extension; Rocky Mountain; Pink Knob; and Big Mountain.
F	No areas suggested for wilderness. SAA roadless maintained by MRxs that uphold the roadless condition.
G	Large undisturbed areas linked by corridors. Non-motorized recreation emphasized. All SAA roadless suggested for wilderness. Ellicott Rock Addition (81% of acres only); Sarah's Creek (96% of acres).
I	Emphasis on non-motorized settings. Variety of Old Growth communities. SAA roadless suggested for wilderness: Ben Gap; Cedar Mountain; Duck Creek; Ellicott Rock Addition (81% of acres); Foster Branch; Helton Creek; Ken Mountain; Shoal Branch; Tate Branch (84% of acres); Tripp Branch; Wilson Cove.

Issue 9 - Forest Health

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Manage National Forest ecosystems, through restoration or maintenance, to provide the desired composition (species mix), structure (age class distribution), function (resulting benefits), and productivity over time.

- Reduce the impacts from native or nonnative invasive species.

Forest pests threaten economic, social, and biological values. Risk to national forests by both native and nonnative species is increasing, as is the debate over how forest insects and diseases should be viewed. Some of the major concerns related to this issue of forest health include oak decline, dogwood anthracnose, gypsy moth, balsam woolly adelgid, hemlock woolly adelgid, southern pine beetle, and invasive exotic pest plants.

Some people see dead, dying, or down trees as evidence of poor health or lack of good stewardship. They see that active management can improve, and may be essential for, forest health. Others want more natural landscapes with little or no human intervention of any kind. They recognize that tree mortality can provide desirable ecological values such as standing dead snags, down trees, and canopy gaps that provide for new growth. Some contend that current national forest management does not address the "real" threats to forest health, such as air pollution, exotic plant and animal species, and stream sedimentation. Nearby private landowners also express concerns about possible forest pest threats to their lands from National Forests System lands.

Concerns have been expressed about the changing ecological conditions and their susceptibility to insects, diseases, and pests. Some feel that these changed conditions are the result of fire-suppression activities, the limited use of prescribed fires, and a lower level of disturbance compared with historic levels. The level of management needed to protect special areas or values, such as wilderness or certain habitats for threatened and endangered species, often creates concerns about forest pest management. There are also concerns about the use of pesticides, with some indicating that it is a tool that still needs to be used, while others feel the risks are too great and other methods should be used.

Others point out that insects and diseases have altered the ecological conditions. Examples are the elimination of the American chestnut by the exotic chestnut blight fungus and the wide-scale, repeated defoliation by the gypsy moth. These changes affect other areas of concern, such as wildlife habitats, recreation opportunities, and wood product values.

Where appropriate, the Forest Plan will include an identification of the ecological conditions necessary to lessen the threats from forest pests. The management

direction in the Forest Plan should also be defined in such a manner that managers can determine the appropriate response when an area is threatened by forest pests.

Table 2- 40 and Table 2- 41 show the comparison of Issue 9 by alternatives. These tables describe the emphasis on forest pests, restoration, and prescribed fire under the various alternatives.

The comparison of alternatives uses a ranking for each forest health concern. A ranking was used because of two factors; (a) the relationship of management opportunities to individual forest health concerns did not vary in a uniform way across all of them even when the trend was in one direction, and (b) for non-native invasive species, the relationship between the concern and management actions was inverse; that is, more activity results in greater concern about invasive species rather than less. Rankings overcame these problems and allowed calculation of a ranking order with alternatives arranged on a continuum from most capable of dealing with forest health overall (1) to least capable (7). The intent is to show an overview of relative success of alternatives their in potential to respond to multiple known forest health concerns. (There is no effective control mechanism for Beech Bark Disease.)

Table 2- 40. Issue 9 – Forest Health – Chattahoochee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Forest Health Concerns	**Ranking (1 is best situation; 7 is worst)**						
Gypsy Moth	4	2	3	6	1	7	5
Southern Pine Beetle	3	2	1	5	5	6	4
Oak Decline	4	2	3	6	1	7	5
Beech Bark Disease	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Littleleaf Disease	4	3	2	6	1	5	5
Non-native Invasive Plants	3	4	5	2	6	1	3
Storm Damage	4	3	2	5	1	6	4
Summary Rank	**4**	**2**	**3**	**6**	**1**	**7**	**5**
Prescribed Fire	**Acres in Thousands**						
Estimated Annual Acres Prescribed Burned (Total)	10.4	11.3	12.4	8.6	2.5	7.3	12.0
Restoration	**Acres**						
Acres with a Restoration Emphasis (Rx's 9C, 9D, 9E, 9G, 9H)	3,034	197,725	13,465	1,002	N/A	30,026	172,718
Estimated Average Annual Acres of Restoration							
Shortleaf pine-Pitch pine-Table Mountain pine	103	112	123	34	N/A	17	210
Table Mountain pine	52	56	62	17	N/A	8	100
Oak/Oak-Pine	103	112	123	34	N/A	17	125
Mtn Longleaf	103	112	123	34	N/A	17	110
Canebrake	5	5	5	5	N/A	5	5
Woodlands	1,030	1,120	1,230	340	N/A	170	1,000

Table 2- 41. Issue 9 – Forest Health – Oconee National Forest

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Forest Health Concerns	**Ranking (1 is best situation; 7 is worst)**						
Gypsy Moth	2	3	4	5	1	6	7
Southern Pine Beetle	3	3	4	5	2	6	1
Oak Decline	2	3	4	5	1	6	7
Beech Bark Disease	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Littleleaf Disease	4	3	5	6	1	7	2
Non-native Invasive Plants	6	3	5	4	7	1	2
Storm Damage	2	5	3	4	1	7	6
Summary Rank	2	3	4	5	1	6	4
Prescribed Fire	**Acres in Thousands**						
Estimated Annual Acres Prescribed Burned (Total)	15.5	14.8	15.4	14.6	4.5	13.1	20.0
Restoration	**Acres**						
Acres with a Restoration Emphasis (Rx's 9C, 9D, 9E, 9G, 9H)	26,082	44,117	26,671	21,403	N/A	21,878	35,006
Estimated Average Annual Acres of Restoration							
Oak/Oak-Pine	54	51	53	51	N/A	45	55
Canebrake	15	15	15	15	N/A	15	15
Woodlands	107	102	106	101	N/A	90	110
Shortleaf Pine	107	102	106	101	N/A	90	110
Pine-Oak	107	102	106	101	N/A	90	110

Issue 10 - Special Areas and Rare Communities

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Protect or restore the rare communities found on National Forest lands
- Manage those areas with special geological, paleontological, botanical, zoological, cultural, or heritage characteristics to protect those characteristics (or where feasible restore them)

The current plans identified several types of "special areas," which are areas the Forest Service has the authority to administratively designate. Areas can be designated for special or unique aesthetic values, or because they provide unique and exceptional recreation experiences. They may also be designated as special areas because of archaeological, biological, geological, historical, or paleontological resource values. Ecological communities such as caves, coves, rock outcrops, balds, and wetlands have been identified as possible special areas. Concerns have been raised that some of these special areas are not adequately protected from activities in the surrounding areas, indicating the possible need for larger areas to be protected. In some cases, additional Forest Plan direction may be needed to preserve and protect natural sites, as well as historic and prehistoric roads and trails.

Numerous concerns have been expressed about managing rare communities, such as those identified in the Southern Appalachian Assessment. The assessment states that conservation of 31 types of rare terrestrial communities is a key to conserving rare plant and animal species. Eighty-four percent of federally-listed, terrestrial threatened and endangered species in the Southern Appalachians are associated with rare communities and streamside habitats, which occur on less than 1 percent of the area. Similar groupings of listed aquatic and semi-aquatic species can be identified, although typing and inventory of rare aquatic communities has not been completed.

Comments have been made that rare communities are limited by past land uses and current management. Some express concern that timber harvesting and recreational uses will further reduce these communities if they are not protected. Other comments indicate that the biggest threats to these communities are from insects and diseases. Still others express that existing land allocations adequately protect most of these areas and there is no justification for establishing additional areas for special protection. The revised forest plans will need to consider a range of management options for these areas and determine which options are needed to protect, maintain, or enhance these rare communities.

Table 2- 42 shows the comparison of Issue 10 by alternatives. This table shows the emphasis on special areas and rare communities under the various alternatives.

Table 2- 42. Issue 10 – Special Areas and Rare Communities

Alternative/Units of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Special Areas	**Acres in Thousands**						
Acres Allocated to Special Areas (RX 4's)	48	39	28	87	12	229	97
Rare Communities							
Rare Communities Managed According to the Rare Community Mgt. Pres. (9F)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
	Acres						
Estimated Annual Average Acres of Restoration Activities							
Chattahoochee							
Table Mountain Pine	52	56	62	17	N/A	8	100
Canebrakes	5	5	5	5	N/A	5	5
Woodlands	1,030	1,120	1,230	340	N/A	170	1,000
Oconee							
Canebrakes	15	15	15	15	N/A	15	15
Woodlands	107	102	106	101	N/A	90	110

Issue 11 - Wild and Scenic Rivers

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the Wild, Scenic, and Recreation Rivers which are designated by Congress, recommended for designation, or are eligible for designation.

The Chattooga River is the only WSR designated stream on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests. With its rough whitewater, it is a very popular raft/kayak trip. Many streams were reviewed for possible study for WSR. The designation of wild and scenic rivers (WSR) is a multistage process. "Eligibility" is determined through an inventory of streams and rivers that have outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs). Eligible streams then are classified as wild, scenic, or recreational. Next, "suitability" studies of the streams are accomplished to determine which streams can be recommended to Congress for possible designation.

When eligible rivers are analyzed for suitability, the determination of whether or not to recommend an eligible river for designation will vary based on the overall management emphasis of the Forest Plan alternatives. Some people have responded that they want certain rivers or all eligible rivers recommended for national designation. For those rivers recommended for designation as National Wild and Scenic Rivers, methods of protecting or enhancing the rivers' ORVs will vary according to their classification.

Table 2- 43 and Table 2- 44 show the comparison of Issue 11 by alternatives, indicating the aggregate number of stream miles designated or otherwise protected, and specifically which streams are expected to be recommended.

Table 2- 43. Issue 11 - Wild and Scenic Rivers – Protected Miles

Alternative/Units Of Comparison	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
Miles of Rivers Currently Designated-Chattooga WSR	48	48	48	48	48	48	48
Miles of Rivers Eligible-Oconee	55.7	55.7	55.7	55.7	55.7	55.7	55.7
Miles of Rivers Eligible-Chattahoochee	112	112	112	112	112	112	112
Total Designated and Eligible	215.7	215.7	215.7	215.7	215.7	215.7	215.7
Miles of Rivers Managed to Protect their Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs)-Oconee	34.9	44.6	34.9	44.6	55.7	34.9	34.9
Miles of Rivers Managed to Protect their Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs)-Chatt.	25.5	66.5	63.5	68.5	112	71.2	74
Miles of Suitable Rivers Recommended for further study for WSR designation-Oconee	20.8	11.1	20.8	11.1	0	20.8	20.8
Miles of Suitable Rivers Recommended for further study for WSR designation-Chatt.	**38**	**45.5**	**48.5**	**43.5**	**0**	**40.5**	**38**
Total Protected or Recommended	119.2	167.7	167.7	167.7	167.7	167.4	167.7

Table 2- 44. Issue 11 – Wild and Scenic Rivers – Management Direction

Alt.	Management Emphasis
A	Suitable rivers recommended: Ocmulgee River; Conasauga/Jacks Rivers; Chattahoochee River; Overflow Creek; Little River. Recommend rivers that have potential for concessionaire, outfitter- guide trips, camping, etc., if these uses are compatible with outstanding remarkable values.
B	Suitable rivers recommended: Ocmulgee River; Conasauga/Jacks Rivers; Chattahoochee River; Tallulah/Coleman Rivers; Overflow Creek. Biologically emphasize natural processes with scenery and riparian ecosystems emphasized.
D	Suitable rivers recommended: Ocmulgee River; Conasauga/Jacks Rivers; Chattahoochee River; Tallulah/Coleman Rivers; Overflow Creek; Little River. Balanced age classes of the forest communities' sustained yield management emphasized.
E	Suitable rivers recommended: Ocmulgee River; Conasauga/Jacks Rivers; Chattahoochee River; Tallulah River; Overflow Creek. Emphasis is on providing developed recreation opportunities.
F	No Suitable rivers recommended; all would be allocated to 4.H. MRx.
G	Suitable rivers recommended: Ocmulgee River; Conasauga/Jacks Rivers; Tallulah/Coleman Rivers; Overflow Creek; Little River. Suitable WSRs to connect large blocks of unfragmented land by corridors.
I	Suitable rivers recommended: Ocmulgee River; Conasauga/Jacks Rivers; Chattahoochee River; Overflow Creek; Little River. Ecosystem restoration is emphasized especially watersheds, riparian corridors, with forest health a priority.

Issue 12 - Access and Road (Travelway) Management

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Provide a transportation system that supplies and improves access for all Forest road users within the capabilities of the land.
- Accelerate the pace of decommissioning unneeded roads (classified and unclassified).
- Provide better quality access by upgrading highly-used Forest roads and any roads that are needed, but which are adversely effecting surrounding resource values and conditions.

System roads are the primary means of national forest access; however, they are also a source of many concerns. These concerns predominantly center on the environmental effects of roads, which will also be addressed in the discussions of other issues such as riparian corridors, threatened and endangered species, and watersheds.

Some people would like to see motorized access to the national forests increased, especially during hunting seasons, for recreational uses, or to meet forest management needs. Other people, however, feel that road construction should be limited and some existing roads decommissioned. Other comments were made that new roads should not be constructed for the purposes of logging, resource management, or for OHV use. The amount of motorized access will need to be balanced with wildlife habitat needs, the need to provide both motorized and nonmotorized recreational opportunities, the need to protect the soil and water resources, and forest health management access.

Table 2- 45 shows the comparison of Issue 12 by alternatives.

Table 2- 45. Issue 12 – Access/Road (Travelway) Management

Alt.	Management Direction
A	Public access would be increased in high-use areas to increase opportunities for recreation type uses, including off-highway vehicles (OHVs). Existing roads in high-use areas may be improved. Decrease in open roads.
B	Access would be reduced to restore and protect aquatic systems, soils, and plant/animal communities. Access to implement restoration activities would be provided. Decrease in long-term permanent open road miles.
D	Access provided to meet the balanced age class emphasis and provide wildlife habitat. Access would be increased and maintained to facilitate sustained yield management.
E	Public access would be increased in high-use areas to increase opportunities for recreation type uses, including OHVs. Existing roads in high-use areas may be improved. Roads not meeting above criteria would be analyzed for decommissioning
F	Current Forest Plan direction on roads such as a slight decrease in open roads and some decommissioning.
G	Road network would be reduced. Administrative use roads would increase; use for trails would increase. Decommissioning of un-needed or redundant roads would increase.
I	Road system may be reduced with less open roads and more administrative use. Decommissioning could increase. Increased temporary use roads to meet management objectives would occur.

Issue 13 – Chattooga River Watershed

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Manage the Chattooga River Watershed in Georgia and South Carolina to protect the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor
- Manage the Watershed to provide multiple uses for desired ecological and social benefits
- Identify appropriate segments of the Wild and Scenic River for boating

Congress designated 57 miles of the Chattooga River, located in Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina as a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System on May 10, 1974. The headwaters of the River begin in North Carolina and form the boundary between Georgia and South Carolina downriver. The river corridor and its immediate surroundings offer many recreational uses such as boating, fishing, swimming, floating, hiking, horseback riding, camping, and sightseeing in remote and occasionally in roaded settings. Recreational boating (kayaking, canoeing, and rafting) has been a popular use of the river for many years, and includes both guided and self-guided users.

The uses of the river are regulated by the Wild and Scenic River Act, season, water level and type of use (commercial and private). Boating uses are currently allowed from downstream of the Highway 28 bridge to Tugalo Lake. The Sumter National Forest is designated as the lead administrative entity for management of the Wild and Scenic River. The Sumter National Forest Land Management Plan revision proposes to allow boating above the Highway 28 bridge by alternative as follows:

- Boating not allowed above Highway 28 in Alternatives B, D, F, G and I
- Boating allowed above Highway 28 in Alternative A to Burrell's Ford Bridge
- Boating allowed above Highway 28 in Alternative E to the North Carolina state line

The Chattooga River watershed also provides a wide range of multiple uses on National Forest lands. The proposed alternatives offer several management options for the lands and resources of the watershed including old growth, wildlife habitat needs, backcountry, restoring vegetation associations, and providing high quality water for recreation and fisheries. Several projects have been implemented in the past 10 years to identify impacts to watershed health and develop strategies for correcting the problems. Products developed in these projects include a multi-scale ecological classification and basin-wide evaluations of water quality. A recent effort to address the restoration of watershed conditions has involved a cooperative effort of agencies and landowners to address problems on a large scale watershed basis.

Table 2- 46 displays the management prescription allocations by alternative for the Chattahoochee National Forest lands in the Chattooga River Watershed.

Table 2- 46. Issue 13 – Chattooga River Watershed Allocations

Management Prescriptions	Alternatives (Acres Allocated)						
	A	B	D	E	F	G	I
0 Custodial	458	458	458	458	420	0	458
1A Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area	2,007	2,007	2,007	2,007	2,007	2,007	2,022
1B Proposed Wilderness	638	2,294	5,802	6,589	0	8,288	562
2A Chattooga W&S River	8,028	8,028	8,028	8,028	0	8,028	8,015
2B1 Proposed W&S River	1,198	1,198	1,198	1,198	0	1,198	317
4C Geologic Areas	430	0	430	430	0	430	0
4D Botanical Areas	0	0	0	0	267	0	0
4F Scenic Areas	0	0	0	0	0	8,458	0
4I Natural Areas	4,574	3,198	0	3,588	0	0	6,280
5A Administrative Sites	5	5	5	5	0	5	5
6A Old Growth - Natural	0	0	0	0	0	557	0
6B Old Growth - Restore	0	0	0	0	0	711	10
6C Old Growth – Mix	0	0	0	0	0	46,788	0
6D Old Growth – Core Areas	3,976	0	3,539	0	0	0	0
7D Concentrated Recreation	0	0	0	1395	24	0	0
7E Dispersed Recreation	36,595	0	0	42,292	262	0	2,679
8A1 Mid to Late Successional	0	35	0	8,781	0	0	13,610
8A2 Forest Interior Habitats	0	13,490	774	0	0	0	0
8A3 High-Elev., Early-Successional	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
9A3 Watershed Restoration	0	18,351	0	0	0	0	16,299
9.F Rare Communities	0	0	0	0	0	0	381
9H Plant Community Restoration	0	27,406	11,369	0	0	0	24,466
10A Sustained Timber Yield	0	0	0	0	61,009	0	0
10B High Quality Forest Products	10,911	0	41,161	0	0	0	0
12A Backcountry – Few Roads	0	0	0	0	5,245	0	1,788
12B Backcountry – Non-Motorized	7,651	0	1,698	1,698	0	0	0

Issue 14 - Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Overriding questions regarding the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) are:

1. What portions of the Oconee National Forest should be designated as a habitat management area (HMA) for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW)?

2. Should it be a Forest Plan goal to acquire lands in order for the Oconee to host a recovery population for the RCW, or maintain current landownership and be a support area for the RCW?

The RCW is an endangered species that the Forest Service is legally required to protect. The Regional Forester has made the decision on management for the RCW and requires the Forest to implement in Forest Plan revision. The Regional Forester decision permits flexibility in implementation. At issue is how we use this flexibility, because public desires conflict with the biology of the RCW.

Presently, the Oconee National Forest hosts 20 active clusters of RCW, and approximately 46,000 acres of the Forest are in an RCW Habitat Management Area. The proposed management direction for the 46,000 acres is consistent across all alternatives. The management prescription adheres to direction from the Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forest in the Southern Region. Because of adherence to the EIS direction and the Threatened and Endangered Species act of 1970, the areas managed for RCW do not vary significantly across alternatives.

Comments received stressed the importance of maintaining habitat for threatened and endangered species. Several comments also stated the need for a more diverse tree species mixture (composition) - in particular, increases in the amount of hardwoods. Comments also suggested a negative response to species composition often referred to as “pine plantations” or “mono-cultured forest.” The significance of this issue on the Oconee relates to the specific habitat requirements of the RCW. The RCW is endemic to the yellow pine forests of the Southeastern United States. Generally, the RCW inhabits mature forests (at least 60 years old) or younger forests where groups of mature trees are present. The RCW also requires contiguous tracts of land. The above-mentioned habitat requirements for the RCW on the national forest dictate species composition, age structure, and silvicultural methods across large acreage on the forest. This legal mandate often conflicts with other proposed uses and desires for the forest.

While nearly all comments were in favor of ensuring the viability of PETS species, including RCW, comments also specified eliminating management for certain species in some areas (no RCW on the Chattahoochee), and limiting the rate at which habitat is created or enhanced (RCW on the Oconee). This issue is significant because it suggests a multitude of management scenarios that must be examined. RCW management is considered as a separate issue because the management possibilities can affect such large areas of the forest. Table 2- 47 shows the comparison of Issue 14 by alternatives.

Table 2- 47. Issue 14 – Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Oconee)

Alt.	Management Direction
A	Very active vegetation manipulation for sustained yield of high quality sawtimber; active management to reduce the risk of insects and disease. Wildlife management for demand species and non-game species increased.
B	Biologically driven to restore wildlife habitats; timber management only for wildlife habitat enhancement; insect and diseases accepted unless in epidemic proportions; natural processes mimicked in a landscape pattern.
D	Major forest types would have a specific target rotation age; wood products and wildlife habitats would be emphasized; access would be increased.
E	Recreation favored; OHV use would be increased; areas would have mostly a closed canopy; a variety of wildlife habitats would be across the landscape.
F	Follow RCW EIS and when approved the RCW Recovery Plan from the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service.
G	Forest interior species habitats emphasized as well as a wide variety of other native plant and animal habitats, particularly late successional species; insects and disease would be tolerated; fire used for habitat restoration.
I	Restoration and maintenance of habitats with forest health a priority.

Issue 15 - Recreational Gold Collecting

In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to:

- Provide opportunities for the recreation visitor to prospect and retrieve placer gold from streams on National Forest lands

- Protect aquatic and riparian habitats, and water quality in stream areas where recreational gold collection is allowed

A deer hunter named Ben Parks first discovered gold in Georgia south of present-day Dahlonega in 1828. Mr. Parks' discovery led to the rapid settlement of the area as many prospectors came seeking fortune from the streams in the mountains. The gold deposits were actively mined on the surface through the use of "hydraulic cannons" that directed water at high pressure into the soft, weathered bedrock to expose gold ore. This type of mining continued after the Civil War and into the 1930s. Numerous streams were prospected for placer (stream gravel) gold deposits. The peak of the mining ended, however, with the discovery of gold in California in 1848. The miners left north Georgia by the wagonload, however evidence of the mining activities, and the impacts to aquatic and riparian ecosystems, still remain in the area.

Ever since that era, searching for gold has been a challenging pastime for numerous recreation visitors to the Forest. Gold panning has been the most common method used to prospect and extract placer gold on streams within the gold belt of the Chattahoochee National Forest. Panning is one of the simplest methods of prospecting used in separating metallic gold from more or less disintegrated rock or sand. The operation usually consists of filling a pan, 8 to 14 inches in diameter and 2 to 4 inches deep, with from 5 to 10 pounds of gold-bearing sand and sediment. The pan is then submerged into water and shaken until the heavier sand particles work their way to the bottom and the lighter, worthless material is removed. The process is repeated until only a few teaspoonfuls of denser materials remain, including, perhaps, some gold. Impacts to streams are short-term, mainly sedimentation and some displacement of bottom gravels and materials.

Additional methods of extraction include sluice boxes and suction dredges. These methods, although common in western states, are not allowed on the Chattahoochee National Forest. Suction dredging for gold in stream channels is a small-scale mining practice whereby streambed material is sucked up a pipe, passed over a sluice box to sort out the gold, and discarded as tailings over another area of bed. Dense materials (including gold, if present) are trapped in the box. Effects to aquatic ecosystems are typically minor and local; however, organisms have been affected. Dredging during periods of incubation of embryos in stream gravels or preceding spawning runs can be detrimental.

Table 2- 48 displays the comparison of Issue 15, Recreational Gold Collecting by Alternative.

Table 2- 48. Issue 15 – Recreational Gold Collecting

Alt.	Management Direction
A	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned and compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Portable sluice boxes and handheld suction dredges allowed by special use permit only on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned, and such activities are compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems.
B	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned, and compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Other prospecting or extraction methods not allowed.
D	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned and compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Portable sluice boxes and handheld suction dredges allowed by special use permit only on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned, and such activities are compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems.
E	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned and compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Portable sluice boxes and handheld suction dredges allowed by special use permit only on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned, and such activities are compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems.
F	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned. Portable sluice boxes and handheld suction dredges not allowed.
G	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned and compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Other prospecting or extraction methods not allowed.
I	Recreational gold panning allowed on streams where mineral rights are Federally owned and compatible with existing aquatic and riparian ecosystems. Other prospecting or extraction methods not allowed.

Issue-16. Special Uses

There are numerous special uses across the Forests, including communication sites, a military installation and training activities, outfitters and guides, private and public roads, and utility corridors. Due to population growth around the Forests, the demand for utility corridors and communication sites has increased significantly in the last ten years across both Forests. Other special uses have remained at relatively stable levels.

Most of the public comments on special uses related to communication sites and utility corridors. Some of the comments received asked for no additional designated communication sites. They asked that use be expanded at existing sites where possible, with no more permits to be issued when those sites are filled. Others stated that there are not suitable sites on private land, since the National Forest encompasses all the high ground, and the Forest should open new sites as necessary to service local needs. Table 2- 49 shows the comparison of Issue 16 by alternatives.

Table 2- 49. Issue 16 – Special Uses

Alt.	Management Direction
A	Maintain existing communication sites, expand where possible; utility corridors allowed on a case-by-case basis.
B	Maintain existing communication sites, expand where possible; no new corridors.
D	Maintain existing communication sites; expand sites where possible. Do not allow utility corridors or communication sites within wilderness, botanical areas, rare communities or inventoried roadless areas.
E	Maintain existing communication sites, expand where possible; corridors allowed on a case-by-case basis; protect inventoried roadless areas from corridors. Outfitter use/permits increased.
F	Maintain existing communication sites, expand where possible; corridors allowed on a case-by-case basis.
G	Allow new communication sites in accordance with land management planning policy, analysis policy, and special use policy on a case-by-case basis.
I	Allow new communication sites in accordance with land management planning policy, analysis policy, and special use policy on a case-by-case basis. Do not allow utility corridors or communication sites within wilderness, botanical areas, rare communities or inventoried roadless areas.