



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service  
Southern Region

# Record of Decision Environmental Impact Statement for the Land and Resource Management Plan

## *Cherokee National Forest*





**Record of Decision  
Environmental Impact Statement  
for the  
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan  
Cherokee National Forest**

Cherokee National Forest  
Carter, Cocke, Greene, Johnson, McMinn, Monroe, Polk, Sullivan, Unicoi and  
Washington Counties, Tennessee  
Ashe County, North Carolina, Washington County, Virginia

Responsible Agency:           USDA - Forest Service

Responsible Official:         Robert Jacobs, Regional Forester  
  USDA - Forest Service, Southern Region  
  1720 Peachtree Road NW  
  Atlanta GA 30309

For Information Contact:     Anne Zimmermann, Forest Supervisor  
  Cherokee National Forest  
  P.O. Box 2010  
  2800 North Ocoee Street  
  Cleveland, TN 37320  
  Telephone: 423-476-9700

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## **I. Introduction**

This public Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LMP) for the Cherokee National Forest (CNF). The previous LMP for the CNF was approved in 1986. The revised LMP will guide all resource management activities on the CNF for the next 10-15 years.

The CNF is located in easternmost Tennessee. It covers parts of Ashe County, North Carolina, Carter, Cocke, Greene Johnson, Jefferson, McMinn, Monroe, Polk, Unicoi and Washington Counties, Tennessee and Washington County, Virginia. It covers approximately 639,880 acres. It is the only national forest in Tennessee, and is the only location in the state where one may visit the southern Appalachian Mountains.

The CNF is the source of many streams and rivers. Many rare and unique terrestrial and aquatic habitats that can be found nowhere else in Tennessee are located on the CNF. The great expanse of public land renders this a highly desired source for many kinds of recreation.

Its special landscape features and the species they support make the CNF one of America's most valued forests. This revised LMP is a blueprint for restoring and maintaining a healthy, resilient forest resistant to forest insects, diseases and other potential impacts while maintaining a variety of habitats and the natural beauty.

The revised LMP is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA), the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), and the 2000 revision of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan. The National Forest Management Act of 19076 (NFMA) requires all national forests in the National Forest System (NFS) to develop LMPs that direct resource management activities on the national forests. These LMPs are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10- to 15- year cycle.

## **II. My Decision**

I selected Alternative I from the Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Cherokee National Forest. I have decided that Alternative I (the Selected Alternative) does the best job of incorporating scientific analysis and responding to the views of American citizens, legal mandates, and national policy. The Selected Alternative is a modification of the Preferred Alternative in the draft EIS issued in February 2003. By selecting this alternative, I am also approving the LMP that describes in detail the goals, objectives, standards, management area direction, lands suitable for various multiple uses, lands recommended to Congress for wilderness study and, lands available for federal mineral leasing.

My decision strikes a balance between competing demands expressed by many people. It addresses Americans' needs and desires for this national forest. Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. Several thousand comments were received during the development of the LMP beginning in 1993. These comments helped guide the LMP revision team as they developed the LMP. This ROD and the supporting documents will shape the management of the CNF for the next 10 to 15 years.

The LMP meets our legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. I want to make it clear that the Forest Service understands its special role in managing the national forests. The Selected Alternative maximizes net public benefits for future generations to use and enjoy through strong conservation measures to protect, maintain, improve, and restore our

sources of clean water, habitat for all native plants and animals, old growth conditions, the unique scenic beauty of the CNF, and a healthy resilient forest to reduce risks from wildfire, insects, diseases and other threats.

Through their representatives in Congress, Americans have told the Forest Service that the 191 million acres of their national forests and grasslands are to be managed with a multiple-use philosophy. The Selected Alternative continues to provide a wide variety of recreation experiences with an emphasis on backcountry opportunities, hunting and fishing.

I believe the LMP is within the physical and biological capability of the land and that this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability. This decision applies only to the CNF lands and does not apply to any other federal, state, or private lands, although the effects to these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the forests are considered.

#### **A. COMPONENTS OF THE DECISION**

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the revised LMP were developed according to the NFMA, its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219 (dated September 30, 1982 and as amended), the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies and how they respond to issues and concerns.

The LMP provides direction to assure coordination of multiple-uses (outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness) and sustained yield of products and services [16 USC 1604(e)]. It fulfills legislative requirements and addresses local, regional, and national issues. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies and how they respond to the issues. I have studied and considered the FEIS in order to make the following decisions:

1. Management direction and associated long-range goals and objectives for the next 10-15 years in order to provide for multiple use and sustained yield of the products and services people use from the CNF, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, water, wildlife, fish, and wilderness. The LMP establishes this direction in Chapter 2. [36 CFR 219.11(b)]

2. Management areas, which reflect biological, physical, watershed, and social differences; and management prescriptions, which reflect different desired conditions and provide the specific information used to develop projects to implement the LMP. The LMP establishes 15 management areas in Chapter 4. The management prescriptions are described in Chapter 3 and displayed on the LMP prescription allocation map. [36 CFR 219.11(c)]

3. Standards, which set the sideboards for achieving the goals, objectives and desired conditions and provide meaningful direction when implementing projects. The revised LMP contains standards that apply across the entire CNF in Chapter 2 and those that apply to specific areas of the national forest in Chapters 3 and 4. [36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27]

4. Lands suitable for different types of uses, and on lands which are suitable for timber production, the maximum timber harvesting levels (or Allowable Sale Quantity) ensuring a sustained yield of wood products in perpetuity. The suitability of different lands for different uses on the CNF is described by management prescriptions in Chapter 3 of the LMP.

Approximately 278,849 acres, or 44 percent of the national forest are designated suitable for timber production. The ASQ is found in Appendix F of the LMP. The plan projects and average annual ASQ of 39,968 thousand cubic feet for the next decade. [36 CFR 219.14) and 36 CFR 219.16]

5. Areas that are recommended for special designation. [36 CFR 219.17] Seven areas are recommended for wilderness status, (Big Frog Addition, Little Frog Addition NW, Little Frog Addition NE, Sampson Mountain Addition, Big Laurel Branch Addition, Upper Bald River, and Joyce Kilmer/Slickrock Addition) totaling about 20,265 acres. As noted in the names, most of the recommendations are additions to existing wilderness. Upper Bald River is separated from existing wilderness area by a road that will be maintained open for vehicular travel and outside the wilderness recommendation.

A segment of the Conasauga River is eligible for “Wild River” status and another segment eligible for “Scenic River” status, identified in Chapter 3 of the revised LMP. In addition, a segment of the Elk River and the Nolichucky River are eligible for “Scenic River” classification, and segments of the Beaverdam Creek, Conasauga, Hiwassee and Tellico Rivers are eligible for “Recreational River” classification. Further study of the eligible river segments is required before they may be recommended for permanent status. [36 CFR 219.17]

6. Monitoring and evaluation requirements needed to ensure that the direction is carried out and to determine how well outputs and effects were predicted. These requirements are contained in Chapter 5 of the LMP. [36 CFR 219.11(d)]

## **B. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

I have decided to select Alternative I as the LMP for the CNF. I believe the LMP is within the physical and biological capability of the land and that this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability. The revised LMP is responsive to the Forest Service’s National Strategic Plan (2000), and it meets our legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. The optimal implementation rate for the LMP could require higher funding levels in some areas that those currently allocated; however, I believe the management direction changes envisioned in the revised LMP can be implemented under current budget levels. The attainment of desired conditions and outputs in some areas, however, may be prolonged or reduced if future budgets decrease.

The following discussions summarize many important factors that I considered. They explain why I believe Alternative I, as described in the EIS, will maximize net public benefits when compared to the other alternatives.

The response of each alternative to the 12 significant issues was a major consideration in the decision to select Alternative I. The reasons for choosing the selected alternative are discussed below on an issue-by-issue basis. Chapter 3 of the EIS describes in detail the effects of expected management actions on the various forest resources.

## **2. RESPONDING TO THE ISSUES**

### **Issue 1: Terrestrial Plants and Animals and Their Associated Habitats**

The overall goal is to maintain a high degree of habitat diversity. The southern Appalachian mountains naturally support great habitat diversity due to the range in climate, topography, orientation and altitude. Habitats have been altered by human habitation. The CNF has the opportunity to restore and maintain habitats that may have been more prevalent in the past.

The alternatives were compared to evaluate the projected outcomes for various habitat elements over the next 50 years under plan implementation. Examples include widely distributed habitats such as mesic deciduous hardwood forest as well as rarer habitats such as Table Mountain pine forests, and specific elements such as snags and downed woody debris, and grassy openings. Effects of implementing restoration objectives are displayed for each habitat element by alternative in the EIS Chapter 3, Biological Elements, and in the Terrestrial Species Viability Evaluation section, and Appendix E, Table K.

All alternatives with the exception of F provide optimal protection for existing habitat occurrences. Alternative B improves habitat abundance and distribution for the highest number of species/habitat relationships, yet emphasis varies by alternative and no single alternative provides a clear benefit to all habitats. Only three alternatives (A, B, and I) have no adverse effect on habitat abundance and distribution as a direct effect of management (EIS Chapter 3, table labeled “Number of species/habitat relationships rated as of very high, high, and moderately high risk to terrestrial species viability for each category of management effect by forest plan revision alternative, Cherokee National Forest”). All alternatives with the exception of D and F would provide a diverse mix of terrestrial plant and animal habitat conditions while meeting some level of public demand for a variety of wildlife values and issues.

I choose Alternative I because it recognizes the unique role of the national forest in providing older, interior forest habitats in balance with the recognition of the importance of native pine forest, woodland, grassland, and early successional habitats. Despite Alternative I’s recognition of the importance of early successional forest habitat, the CNF will continue to provide a successional forest mix dominated by late successional forests. Forty-six percent of the CNF will be in a late-successional condition by the end of the first decade and 67 percent after five decades of LMP implementation. In contrast, three percent of the CNF will be less than ten years of age.

### **Issue 2: Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive/Locally Rare Species**

The CNF has 16 federally listed endangered species, nine federally listed threatened species, 145 sensitive species, and many other species of viability concern that occur within the administered lands or are close enough that they could be impacted by our activities. These species represent every major taxonomic group. The Forest Service is required to manage NFS lands to achieve recovery objectives for threatened and endangered species (FSM 2670.21) and to maintain viable populations for all native and desired non-native species (FSM 2670.22) including sensitive species.

Each alternative was compared (Chapter 2 and Table L of Appendix E to the EIS) to evaluate the relative effect it would have on species of viability concern. Impacts to aquatic species of viability concern were assessed based on Forestwide standards relevant to streamside filter zones and riparian prescription (Rx11) width standards. Terrestrial species of viability concern were

assessed based on the number of species and habitats that were rated as being at moderate, high and very high risk by the management proposals in each alternative.

Because the streamside filter zones and riparian prescription standards did not vary between alternative (except Alternative F) and they were judged to adequately protect the aquatic habitats, there was no difference between alternatives for aquatic species. Risks to terrestrial species viability are minimized by EIS Alternatives B, A, E, G, and I that provide optimal mixes of habitats for the full range of species needs.

The viability concern is addressed through the selection of more stringent standards in prescriptions where species of viability concern or their habitats were most abundant – 4.K (Roan Mountain), 9.F (Rare Communities), and 11 (Riparian). Need for additional protection for species of viability concern and their habitats will be considered during analysis and project design.

With the exception of Alternative F, all alternatives include the latest strategies for management and recovery of threatened, endangered and sensitive species. Rare communities are an important part of our strategy to protect and conserve species of viability concern. We worked with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to identify rare communities and special biological areas because they contribute significantly to plant and animal diversity, particularly the species of viability concern. All alternatives, except Alternative F, set aside these special areas for management to conserve and improve their natural composition, structure, and functions in order to support the species associated with them. Alternative I does the best job of protecting species of viability concern while also addressing the remaining significant issues in a balanced manner.

### **Issue 3: Old Growth**

The CNF has no known lands that meet all four criteria for old growth as established in the Report of the Region 8 Old-Growth Team, June 1997. There are lands that meet minimum age requirements, however, other criteria are not met or they have yet to be field checked and verified. Emphasis is on identifying and managing for possible old growth and future old growth.

Old growth management for the CNF LMP is based on Guidance for Conserving and Restoring Old-Growth Forest Communities on National Forests in the Southern Region, Report of the Region 8 Old-Growth Team, June 1997.

To address the old-growth issue all alternatives rely heavily on possible and future old-growth allocations. Possible old-growth areas are those that meet the age criteria and future old are those management prescriptions that are compatible with old-growth characteristics. Goals and objectives that address mapping patches of old growth and completing inventories on possible old-growth during site specific stand examinations are in Chapter 2 of the LMP.

The amount of “possible old growth”, areas that meet the minimum age requirement, is the same for all alternatives. Future old-growth varies among the alternatives based on management prescription allocations. Among the alternatives analyzed in detail, Alternative E would have the highest number of acres in old-growth compatible management prescriptions and alternative D would have the lowest. Allocations in Alternative I provide a balance of old-growth compatible management prescriptions with those that meet an array of other objectives such as forest restoration, wildlife habitat development, and forest health. Almost 60 percent of the total acres for the CNF would be in old-growth compatible management prescriptions in Alternative I. I

select Alternative I because it not only because it provides for 373,500 acres of future old growth, but also provides for the needs of species reliant on younger forests and forest health.

#### **Issue 4: Riparian Area Management, Water Quality, and Aquatic Habitats**

Water supply is abundant in the CNF; however, expanding urbanization and development in the region is creating increased demands and impacts on the water resource. According to the Southern Appalachian Assessment, most water quality impacts result from non-point source pollution. Soil erosion and sedimentation, and nutrient, chemical and bacterial contamination can result directly or indirectly from land uses. Water derived from lands of the CNF is generally of excellent quality and meets or exceeds federal and state criteria established for beneficial water use. Roads, trails, and areas of concentrated human use may create localized water quality concerns, however. Several rivers flowing through the CNF are impaired, and do not support or only partially support their designated use classification. These rivers are impaired due to pollution sources on other ownerships or due to flow alteration for power generation.

Riparian ecosystems on the CNF are associated with streams, lakes, springs, seeps and other wetland areas. Most riparian areas are properly functioning and support the values associated with these areas. Roads, trails and recreation use can and has impacted some of these areas. Restoration may be possible to improve the function and condition of these degraded riparian sites. Opportunities may also exist to improve the vegetative health and diversity of riparian sites where vegetation (dead and alive) does not reflect the potential natural diversity of plant communities.

Riparian ecosystems contain all of the aquatic habitats (streams, lakes, ponds, springs and seeps) essential to the viability of hundreds of vertebrate, invertebrate, and plant species. Most of these habitats are in excellent condition on the CNF and fully support their associated aquatic communities. Some aquatic habitats are impacted by sediment from roads and other ground disturbing activities. Road improvements are a high priority and are being successfully implemented to alleviate these impacts. Standards in the LMP maintain and protect these habitats and the species dependent on them. Reintroduction of extirpated species and augmentation of diminished populations may be necessary to insure the viability of some species.

The key aspects of this issue include: 1) maintaining and/or restoring riparian ecosystems that reflect the physical structure (soils/woody debris/ flow regime), biological components, and ecological processes needed to protect associated values and proper function, 2) maintenance of watershed conditions that result in streams that normally function within natural ranges of flow, sediment movement, temperature, and other variables, and 3) providing the amount, distribution, and characteristics of aquatic habitats necessary to maintain populations of indigenous and desired nonnative species.

My criteria for evaluating alternatives and addressing this issue are: 1) provides direction that maintains and, as necessary, restores the hydrologic condition of watersheds to produce water that meets state water quality criteria and beneficial uses, 2) meets desired ecological outcomes for riparian and aquatic ecosystems, 3) promotes partnerships and coordination with federal, state and local agencies and other interested entities to improve the condition of impaired watersheds and complete water improvements across jurisdictional and ownership boundaries, and 4) be responsive to comments on the draft EIS and revised LMP.

None of the alternatives would result in a wide variation of response to the criteria. All alternatives would implement forest-wide and riparian management standards to protect and improve water quality, aquatic habitat and riparian area condition. Table 2-6 (EIS, Chapter 2) displays the differences, by alternative, for trends in sediment yield and acres allocated to watershed emphasis prescriptions.

All alternatives emphasize watershed and riparian maintenance and restoration through land allocation and/or management direction. Alternatives F and I do not utilize the watershed emphasis prescriptions (9.A) as do other alternatives, but prescription allocations and management direction result in the protection, restoration and proper functioning of watershed, riparian and aquatic conditions. All alternatives prioritize watershed improvement needs through watershed or landscape assessments, and promote collaborative processes among stakeholders within impaired or other priority watersheds to maintain and/or improve watershed condition.

Alternative I meets my requirements for maintenance and restoration of the hydrologic condition of watersheds, the desired ecological outcomes for riparian and aquatic ecosystems, promotion of partnerships and coordination with federal, state and local agencies and other interested parties and provides a balanced approach to responding all the significant issues.

### **Issue 5: Wood Products**

Not all alternatives have objectives specific to timber production. However, alternatives that do not have these specific objectives use timber management as a means of achieving other resource objectives. Desired conditions and objectives for management prescription allocations guide where timber management activities may occur on the landscape. Even where allocations allow for timber management there are areas that are not efficient or in some cases not appropriate for timber management activities, such as, steep slopes, riparian areas, and areas where access is prohibitive. Outputs for timber production will be based on meeting goals and objectives with harvest scheduling based on long-term sustainability of all resources. Timber management activities will achieve desired conditions through activities and treatments that are not detrimental to other resources.

My criterion for addressing wood products is based on management prescription allocations for each alternative. Alternatives that have management prescription objectives that are specific to timber production are A, D, and F. Other alternatives have management prescriptions that include timber management as a tool to achieve early successional habitat objectives and will have scheduled outputs for wood products. These are alternatives B, E, G, and I. Alternative F has the largest projected output of wood products and Alternative E has the lowest. Alternative I has a moderate level of scheduled outputs for wood products based on objectives for creating early successional habitat.

The selected alternative, alternative I, identifies 420,047 acres as suitable for timber production (table 2-7 in the EIS). The allowable sale quantity will be approximately 39.9 million cubic feet in the first decade. Although this is higher than Alternatives A, B, E and G, it is lower than Alternatives D and F. This value is higher than what is currently being harvested.

I select Alternative I because it best balances the need to provide a sustainable flow of forest products while protecting and conserving the many other values the CNF has to offer.

## **Issue 6: Aesthetic/Scenery Management**

Due to the mountainous terrain, much of CNF can be seen from interior and adjacent roads, trails and waterways. Three interstate highways, two designated scenic byways, and numerous federal, state and county highways provide views into the CNF. The CNF road system allows users motorized access into much of the interior. The trail system provides more than 600 miles of pathway to access the CNF, including 150 miles of the Appalachian Trail and four other nationally designated trails. Eight rivers, three TVA lakes, two small recreation lakes and innumerable streams provide a backdrop to the CNF scenery and water access for water play, fishing and other uses.

Public lands in the southern Appalachians provide the majority of the natural-appearing landscape character settings found in the region, many of which lie in remote settings. Most rural settings occur on private lands, providing scenic, cultural and working landscapes such as pasture and partially forested areas. (SAA S/C/E, p. 140).

The criteria for evaluating alternatives for this issue are: (1) protecting and enhancing the scenic and aesthetic values of national forest lands; (2) managing to provide a variety of Landscape Character Themes, predominantly natural appearing and natural evolving; (3) striving to raise scenic integrity upward, particularly in areas where existing scenic integrity is Low, Very Low or Unacceptably Low; and (4) being responsive to comments on the DEIS and proposed LMP.

Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) define the different levels of acceptable alteration to the CNF scenery. These were compared by prescription allocations by alternative. Each alternative except the current management, Alternative F, would increase the acres assigned to SIOs of Very High, High and Moderate. I have selected Alternative I because it recognizes the value of the CNF's designated special areas (including scenic and heritage areas and rare communities), viewsheds of major travelways, including trail and water corridors, high elevation mountain balds, and special places identified by the CNFs constituents. This alternative also balances and integrates the importance of scenery with other resources managed under the national forest mission.

CNF landscapes can be predominately grouped into two themes, Natural Appearing and Natural Evolving. Existing designated Wilderness (66,637 acres) is considered naturally evolving, currently approximately ten percent of the total CNF acreage. Wilderness study areas would also be managed as naturally evolving. Other allocations to management prescriptions that emphasize remote settings with few or no open roads may transition from natural appearing to natural evolving. I select Alternative I because the additional 19,400 acres in Wilderness Study Areas will potentially increase natural-evolving landscape character by three percent, to approximately 13.4 percent of the total CNF acreage. Landscape character could transition to natural appearing in an additional 62,700 acres allocated to management prescriptions where roadless character is maintained (see EIS, chapter 3, Roadless/Wilderness). In the selected alternative, this acreage accounts for an additional 9.8 percent of the CNF. Range Management in the selected alternative will insure a small but stable Rural-Pastoral/Agricultural landscape character theme, while the few existing highly developed recreation areas provide the theme of Rural-Forested.

## **Issue 7: Recreation Opportunities/Experiences**

The outdoor recreation opportunities are extensive on the CNF especially with its diversity of water-based, mountain settings including deep river gorges, world-class whitewater, premier

trout streams, scenic waterfalls and reservoirs with undeveloped shoreline. Public demand for these settings to support a wide range of recreation activities and experiences is seemingly endless. However, the CNF capability to meet these demands is neither static nor unlimited.

To maximize value to the public with the limited resources available, the CNF will focus on providing those recreation opportunities that are unique, of exceptional long-term value and not widely available on non-federal lands. This includes the conservation of nearly 75,000 acres of existing inventoried Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) recreation settings outside of designated Wilderness.

In each alternative, areas of the CNF have been allocated to prescriptions that emphasize a desired recreation setting within the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). The desired settings range from Primitive (designated Wilderness) to Rural (developed recreation sites). Based on these allocations, the table in Chapter 2 of the EIS entitled "Issue 7 – Recreation Opportunities/Experiences" shows the resulting alternative distributions of ROS classes across the CNF. This table also compares the total acreage of CNF allocated to prescription areas that emphasize specific recreation experiences such as remote backcountry or Off-Highway Vehicle use.

There will be a better opportunity in the future to maintain valued recreation settings, provide high quality recreation experiences and manage impacts on the land by selecting an alternative that emphasizes recreation management. I have selected Alternative I because it allocates areas of the CNF to prescriptions that would provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities that are not widely available on non-federal lands. The acreage of CNF allocated to prescriptions 12.A, 12.B and 1.B is nearly equivalent to the existing acreage of inventoried SPNM settings outside of designated Wilderness. Overall, prescription allocations will most likely result in an increase in combined acreage of Primitive/SPNM settings over the duration of the plan.

Alternative I also addresses the increasing demand for recreational opportunities and experiences while protecting forest resources through the allocation of Prescription 7.C – Off-Highway Vehicle Use Area, establishment of Screening Criteria for New OHV Systems in Appendix J and limiting equestrian use to designated trails and open and closed classified roads. These and other management options will help develop, enhance, and maintain systems of non-motorized and motorized trails within the capabilities of the land and appropriate to the desired ROS class.

### **Issue 8: Roadless Areas/Wilderness Management**

There are 11 designated Wildernesses totaling 66,389 acres in CNF, approximately ten percent of the total NFS land base. These lie in a range of forest type communities, including Mesic Oak, Southern Yellow Pine, Mixed Mesophytic Hardwoods, Xeric Oak, White Pine-Hemlock-Hardwood and others. Two of the Wildernesses lie in the Southern Blue Ridge Subsection and nine lie in the Metasedimentary Mountains Subsection of the Blue Ridge Section.

The CNF conducted an inventory of 18 roadless areas, including evaluation for potential wilderness (Appendix C, EIS). Forest type communities in these roadless areas are similar to existing wildernesses, and none represent new ecosystem sections or subsections. Recommendations of roadless areas for Wilderness vary by alternative, ranging from zero in one alternative to all or portions of the 18 in two alternatives, one of which was studied in detail.

My criteria for evaluating alternatives for this issue are: (1) managing Wilderness, roadless and other unroaded areas to provide their full range of social and ecological benefits; (2) recommending roadless areas for Wilderness Study when there are demonstrated needs, including connecting extensions or additions to existing designated wildernesses; and (3) being responsive to comments on the draft EIS and Proposed LMP.

The Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 4.19c and Chapter 7.2) identifies the factors to use in evaluating potential wilderness areas. The Regional Forester also issued guidance in 1995, 1997 and 2002 to provide regional consistency on interpreting this direction. The three steps to determining what lands to recommend for wilderness designation include: (1) identifying and inventorying all roadless, undeveloped areas that satisfy the definition of wilderness found in section 2(c) of the 1964 Wilderness Act, including finding areas “of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.” and that provide “outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation;” (2) evaluating these areas to determine their “suitability” for wilderness recommendations, meeting tests of capability, availability and need; and (3) during the development of the forest plan alternatives, analyzing the effects of recommending or not recommending the roadless areas for wilderness.

Recommendations for roadless area designation as wilderness study areas vary by alternative (see tables in EIS, Chapter 2 and detailed study in Chapter 3.) In selecting Alternative I, I am recommending for Wilderness Study Areas five additions to existing wildernesses (5,836 acres), the majority of acreage in a sixth addition (4,804 acres in Big Laurel Branch Addition), and a freestanding area, 9,110-acre Upper Bald River, separated from the existing Bald River Gorge Wilderness by a Forest Service road. These represent 23 percent of the roadless inventory. None of the roadless areas present unique ecological types or areas of research needs that cannot be met within existing wilderness and recommended Wilderness Study Areas.

Additional wilderness allocations would detract from other needs that exist in these areas. For example, wilderness management places restrictions that affect bicycle and motorized access, fisheries and wildlife management (including stocking, restoration and some types of monitoring), fire suppression and management-ignited fires to reduce hazardous fuels, and special uses. All but three percent of the remaining roadless area inventory has been allocated to management prescriptions where the roadless character is maintained. Direction for not allowing road building was included in the Scenic Area prescription, 4.F, where inventoried roadless areas overlap designated scenic areas in Management Areas 8, 12 and 15.

The 20,265 acres recommended for wilderness designation (19,400 acres of which are inventoried roadless areas) will be managed to protect their wilderness characteristics, except that the full range of fire suppression tactics may be used, favoring methods that cause the least disturbance to the land surface. Patterns and intensity of use, fire, and insects and diseases in existing wildernesses will be managed through prescription direction for 1.A, and in accordance with national and state wilderness legislation and Forest Service direction. The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) processes have been conducted for each of the CNF wildernesses and provide area-specific direction.

All or a portion of every roadless area is recommended for WSA allocation in at least one alternative considered in detail. All but 3 percent of the entire 85,195 acres of CNF’s inventoried roadless areas are allocated to management prescriptions that protect their roadless character. The 3 percent includes the Old Forge-Round Knob recreation areas and trail system in Bald Mountain, wildlife opening exclusions where they occur near roads, and offsets from adjacent

roads such as the corridor that runs between Bald River Gorge Wilderness and Upper Bald River Wilderness Study Area.

The proposed allocation of Big Laurel Branch Addition to all Rx 1.B was reallocated in response to concerns over access to the A.T. for trail maintenance and TVA power line maintenance. 86 percent remains allocated to WSA, while the remaining percentage retains its roadless character in Rx 4.A(Appalachian Trail) and 12.A (Remote Backcountry).

For those portions of roadless area allocated to management prescriptions that permit activities that might impact roadless character, the LMP contains direction protecting the roadless character.

I select Alternative I because of its wilderness recommendations and management of all roadless areas, in balance with addressing the significant issues.

### **Issue 9: Forest Health**

Currently, over 70 percent of the stands or trees found on the forested acres on the CNF are 70 years old or older, over 50 percent of the CNF is allocated to Management Prescriptions that are compatible with late successional or old growth characteristics, 1/3 of the CNF pine and mixed pine hardwood community types have been impacted by native bark beetles, non-native adelgids are infesting hemlock forests, a complex of native pests are impacting older upland oak communities, the threat of defoliation and mortality from gypsy moth is projected for the not too distant future, and many non-native plants are invading the CNF. All of these forest health issues will likely result in changes to forest structure and species composition. In the absence of disturbance, including prescribed fire and wildfire, the trend for future species composition would be a reduction of oaks and increases in maples, blackgum, and eastern white pine.

The occurrence of non-native invasive plants is also a forest health concern for the CNF. Non-native invasive species occupy and in some cases dominate sites to the exclusion of native plants. Control of non-native invasive plants is important but treatments for their control or suppression may not be compatible with desired conditions of some management prescriptions.

The ability to manage for healthy forest conditions depends heavily upon land allocations to prescriptions that permit management of undesirable conditions. This would allow control or suppression actions to be taken in the event of native and non-native insect and disease attacks and also allows preventive management actions that can prepare forested communities to be more resilient to attacks, especially from non-native pests. Prescriptions that allow management activities also facilitate control of non-native invasive plants.

All proposed management prescriptions provide for some level of insect and disease control or suppression, depending on threats to resource values associated with individual prescriptions. Those prescriptions that have objectives compatible with late successional or older forest conditions for the long term would be more vulnerable to insect and disease attacks, especially from non-native pests.

Evaluation of management prescriptions that allow scheduled vegetation management activities was used as a measure to compare alternatives. Alternative F has the largest number of acres, about 66 percent, allocated to prescriptions that allow for scheduled vegetation management activities. Alternative E has the least area suitable for vegetation management, about 11 percent and Alternative I has about 44 percent of the CNF available for vegetation management. I selected Alternative I because I feel it does a better job of balancing concerns for

forest health with the amenity values of wilderness, backcountry recreation, scenery, and old growth.

### **Issue 10: Special Areas and Rare Communities**

On the CNF, Special Areas include seven designated Scenic Areas, two Scenic Byways, and approximately 150 miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail. These areas are designated to protect and, where appropriate, foster public use and enjoyment of areas with scenic, historical geological, botanical, zoological, paleontological, archeological or other characteristics.

Alternatives were evaluated based on the acreage of identified special areas allocated to specific special area prescriptions (Rx 4's or 7.A); prescriptions where scenic qualities are emphasized; or prescriptions where other qualities, resources, or communities are emphasized. In Chapter 3 of the EIS, this information is presented in the table "Special Areas: Designated Scenic Areas, Scenic Byways and Appalachian Scenic Trail, Allocations by Alternative." This information is generalized in another table in Chapter 2 of the EIS, "Issue 10 - Special Areas and Rare Communities."

Rare communities occur infrequently on the landscape, but contribute significantly to plant and animal diversity at many levels—to community diversity, to endangered and threatened species recovery, and to species viability. They require maintenance, restoration, inventory and monitoring. As part of Alternative I, the CNF identified, mapped and allocated 26 known rare community sites to the Rare Community (9.F) prescription. These areas include a variety of forested and non-forested site-types, such as spruce-fir forests, beech gaps, caves, barrens, rock outcrops and cliffs, grassy balds, and bogs and other wetlands.

Each alternative was compared to evaluate the relative affect it would have on rare communities. Potential effects to rare communities were assessed based on protection afforded them by the 9.F Prescription (EIS Chapter 2, Comparison of Alternatives by Issue, Issue 10). The EIS (Chapter 3, Biological Elements, Rare Communities) projected future distribution and abundance of each rare community group under each alternative. Management effects of each alternative were also estimated (EIS Appendix E, Terrestrial Species Viability).

Because the rare community prescription goals, objectives and standards did not vary between alternatives and they were judged to adequately protect the habitats, there was no difference found between alternatives, with the exception of Alternative F. Alternative F does not provide a similar, explicit level of protection that is provided in the other alternatives under the Rare Community (9.F) prescription. Protection of rare community sites under Alternative F is entirely dependent on project-level location and analysis. For this reason, management effects of all alternatives other than Alternative F were generally considered to be very similar, unless some external factor (for example, hemlock woolly adelgid) was expected to be beyond the scope of effective human management.

All alternatives provide some level of protection for the affected special areas, but Alternative I allocates the greatest acreage to Special Area prescriptions. Nearly 100 percent of designated scenic areas have been allocated to specific special area prescriptions that protect their valued attributes. I have selected Alternative I to ensure that these special places are conserved for future generations to enjoy.

### **Issue 11: Wild and Scenic Rivers**

Rivers recommended or eligible for wild and scenic river status on the CNF are listed under "Components of the Decision."

Adequate protection of the free flowing condition and outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) determined for each eligible river was the primary criteria for evaluating alternatives.

In all alternatives, affected river corridors have been allocated to prescriptions that adequately protect or enhance the identified ORVs and free flowing condition. This protection will be provided regardless of recommendations from future suitability studies.

I have selected Alternative I because it provides specific river-related management direction by allocating all but two eligible rivers to 2.B prescriptions (wild, scenic or recreation rivers). The Hiwassee River and Tellico River corridors have been allocated to scenery related prescriptions with the intent of not only protecting the river corridors, but the surrounding scenic viewsheds as well.

### **Issue 12: Access/Road Management**

This issue deals with allowing the public to access their national forests while, at the same time, protecting and managing all the resources. In addressing this issue, management activities would strive to accomplish the following:

- 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 are adversely affecting surrounding resource values and conditions.

Four road options were used in the various prescription allocations. Acres to which the four road options would be assigned vary among the alternatives. The four road options are:

1. Although roads would serve as boundaries to the area, the interior would be unroaded throughout the year.
2. Open road density decreases over the planning period through closure of roads [and motorized vehicle trails] that would be unneeded or would cause undesirable resource impacts.
3. Density of open roads [and motorized vehicle trails] remains near the current level throughout the planning period, with only small increases or decreases.
4. Density of open roads [and motorized vehicle trails] would increase to provide improved access to national forest resources.

Among all alternatives, with little exception, areas allocated to prescriptions with road option 4 are the smallest. Road option 3 received the most acres. Road options 1 and 2 were generally in between the range of the other options.

Because the road options are tied directly to the prescriptions, and the prescription allocation represents the optimal method for meeting CNF needs, I choose Alternative I because the resulting mix of road option acres reflects the optimal road density for achieving the desired future conditions of the CNF.

### 3. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the “environmentally preferable” alternative as: the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.”

Alternative G is the environmentally preferable alternative. It would schedule the least amount of timber harvest, associated road development, and involve the least human-induced change to the natural environment. Consequently, of all the alternatives considered in detail, it would have the fewest adverse human-induced effects on the biological and physical environment. It would also have the least amount of beneficial human-induced effects.

Even though Alternative G is preferable from the standpoint of the physical and biological environment, I believe Alternative I provides for a better balance of resource uses and maximizes the net public benefit while protecting the environment. Alternative I is also more responsive to concerns of local communities and achieves a better overall balance of the economic concerns with the environmental issues.

Alternative I incorporates appropriate environmental safeguards to minimize potential adverse effects to the biological and physical environment.

### 4. ALTERNATIVES WITH HIGHER PRESENT NET VALUE

The purposes and principles of National Forest System Land and Resource Management Planning are spelled out in the first paragraph:

“...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(a)]

Net public benefits can be defined as the overall value to the Nation of all outputs (benefits) and positive effects, less all associated inputs (costs) and negative effects, whether they can be quantitatively valued or not.

A component of determining net public benefits is the Present Net Value (PNV), which is used to measure the economic efficiency of each alternative. A comparison of the alternatives’ PNVs, is shown in Table 3-178 of the EIS. As shown in the table, Alternatives A, and E, have higher PNVs than the Alternative I. PNV includes market and non-market values which can be assigned a price, either based on money the Forest Service actually receives for market goods like timber and minerals, or on estimated values from Forest Service research for non-market amenities like wildlife and recreation. Although the timber resources contained within the CNF are important to Tennessee’s economy, I cannot just consider economic benefits. The CNF also holds areas of incredible beauty and solitude, clean water, abundant wildlife, and outstanding recreation opportunities--all of which are important to our spiritual needs and require a mix and balance with other uses. Since PNV does not include these important non-priced benefits, it was not the only criterion I used in my decision.

The CNF must not only provide for today’s consumption and enjoyment, but for those of future generations as well.

Traditionally in the Forest Service, local values and benefits were determined by local people working together with the local district ranger. Today when we ask folks what is important to them in managing the CNF, we hear from people all over the Nation and sometimes the world. Our supply and demand analyses still consider a market area that doesn't extend too far from the national forest boundary where the majority of the impacts exist, but that does not mean we do not recognize that we have people from all over the world hiking the Appalachian Trail and the hardwood sawtimber produced on the CNF contributes in some small way to the nation's gross domestic product by replacing a few million board feet of lumber imports. Citizens from all different points of view want us to quantify these effects, sure in their hearts that this will prove how important their favorite resource is, and thereby proving their position is the right one. Due to the sheer abundance and variety of opinion in the United States, we in the Forest Service often find ourselves in the midst of controversy. With the passage of new laws and changing values, natural resource issues are growing more complex as demands for all these resources continue to increase.

Our growing population does need more wilderness, more lumber, more recreational vehicle hookups, more oil and gas, more old growth forests, more electric transmission lines, more clean water, more trails of all kinds. We also need more beautiful places to escape the rush of the world. We have done our best to try to provide a balanced plan that will provide more of those things that the CNF is uniquely able to supply in Tennessee.

Based on the preceding discussions it is clear that Alternative I does not have the least impact on the environment nor does it generate as many market valued commodities as other alternatives considered in the EIS. However, I believe the Alternative I achieves a balance between the economic benefits and environmental issues and concerns voiced by the American people. I believe Alternative I will increase public benefits by moving the CNF towards improved forest health through its emphasis on restoring native landscape diversity and through its special attention to providing functional old-growth ecosystems and unique plant and animal habitats.

I am also confident that the management proposed in the Revised Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and can be accomplished without reducing that capability.

### **C. CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT AND FINAL**

Over 12,000 individual pieces of mail, including e-mail, were received on the draft EISs and Proposed Revised LMPs across the southern Appalachians. Many offered recommendations or requests for changes or improvements in the environmental analysis; identified changes or improvements to the alternatives; or suggested modifications to the goals, objectives, or standards. Comments received on the draft EIS and accompanying Proposed Revised LMP also identified the need for several minor improvements to analysis and presentation of materials in the final EIS and revised LMP. As a result, editorial or other inconsistencies in the presentation of information in the draft EIS were corrected for the final EIS. Specific modifications to Alternative I and the environmental analysis beyond editorial and inconsistency corrections are explained in this section.

An objective is added to the LMP to provide 1000 acres of early successional habitat at high elevations.

The Rare Community section of Chapter 2 in the LMP, and the Rare Community prescription in Chapter 3 of the LMP have been reorganized to improve understanding and implementation of the intended direction.

Standards associated with management prescription 11 were revised based on public comments, and interdisciplinary field reviews. A clearer delineation between the riparian corridor and streamside filter zone was made to clarify the purpose of each. The concept of streamside management zone was also explained in a text and graphic format. Default values for riparian corridor widths were established for perennial and intermittent streams. The corridor width will no longer change in relation to slope. Determination of the actual riparian area based on field conditions may result in site-specific adjustments to the riparian corridor to ensure the entire actual riparian area is protected without unnecessarily impacting the ability to achieve adjacent management prescription desired conditions. The streamside filter zone width will be slope dependent. The filter zone will no longer vary by soil erosion hazard since this factor is essentially accounted for by slope.

Objectives and standards for watershed assessment, and the determination and maintenance of instream flows needed to protect stream processes, aquatic and riparian habitats and communities, and recreation and aesthetic values were added to Chapter 2 of the LMP.

The A.T. prescription in Chapter 3 of the LMP authorizes special uses only when they do not adversely affect A.T. values and resources.

The old growth discussion in the EIS includes maps and further direction to ensure compliance with the Southern Region Old Growth Guidance.

No Wild and Scenic River recommendations are being made in this decision.

In order to avoid injury to non-volant young Indiana bats, prescribed burning of potential roosting habitat between May 1 and August 15 is prohibited except where site-specific inventories coordinated with FWS indicate Indiana bats are not likely to be present.

Language is added in the EIS to reflect the latest information and direction concerning the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

Corrections to the socio-economic analysis reflect discovery of incorrect variables used in the regional model.

The watershed health index was modified and renamed the watershed condition ranking. Watersheds with a low percentage of NFS ownership were changed from not applicable to their actual rank. Ranking adjustment factors for riparian land use and riparian road density were eliminated. Cumulative effects on aquatic species were reanalyzed using the new watershed condition ranking.

The watershed condition ranking change described above was used to address cumulative effects on aquatic species because it is the most likely source of impacts from management activities, correlates to changes in endemic aquatic species populations, and is the best available science. The relationship between sedimentation and locally adapted species was analyzed for the EIS. The reanalysis did not result in any significant differences in aquatic viability species effects for any alternative including the selected alternative.

Changes made to section 15.0 (Terrestrial Viability Analysis) of the EIS between Draft and Final were based primarily on changes that were made to species' Forest Rank (F-Rank). These changes were made through collaborative work with NatureServe staff and their contractors as refinements to specific data for each species was analyzed. The analysis only considered species with F-Ranks of F1, F2, and F3. Through the refinement process, many species ranked F3 were

changed to F4 as new locations were verified. This resulted in fewer species being analyzed. The tables in the final EIS reflect the new numbers and consequently show less species than what was analyzed in the draft EIS. These changes did not result in any significant differences between alternatives. Rather, it simply resulted in a relative drop in numbers of viability concern species across alternatives. Additional changes between the draft and final EIS were the result of adding a few species that were previously omitted from the analysis. Those species were referenced in the draft.

### **III. Public Involvement**

This revision process has been arduous, lengthy, and at times contentious. I want to sincerely thank all the people who participated in the process, especially those who became involved in the numerous collaborative efforts seeking solutions.

Public comments were critically important to me in shaping a responsible plan for the CNF that best meets the Forest Service mission, the goals of the NFMA, FLPMA, and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the interests of the American public. Preliminary work on the revision of the LMP began in the fall of 1994 when an agency team was formed to identify areas of the LMP that needed to change.

In January 1994, work on the Southern Appalachian Assessment (SAA) began. Formal inventories of the CNF natural and environmental resources were done as part of the SAA using many improved scientific methods and data processing techniques that were unavailable during the development of the 1986 plan. Citizens and scientists from other federal and state agencies reviewed and offered suggestions for improving these inventories.

After the SAA was completed, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise the 1986 LMP was issued in the Federal Register August 1, 1996. This NOI marked not only a new beginning for revising the CNF LMP, but also included the other four national forests in the southern Appalachians, embarking us on an unprecedented process of coordination and cooperation.

Beginning with the SAA, more than 20 southern Appalachian-wide resource team meetings, roughly twenty coordination meetings of the planning team leaders across the southern Appalachians, and almost all regularly scheduled interdisciplinary team meetings were open to the public. This gave citizens unprecedented access to the planning process. It also provided people the opportunity to share and understand the difficulty and complexity of balancing the multiple resources of the CNF along with the diverse and frequently conflicting values of citizens interested in the CNF's management. These meetings were not the heart of our public involvement, however. Since 1994, almost 3,000 people have written letters, attended meetings, participated in discussions, drawn on maps, searched the woods for old growth, prepared reports about roadless areas, poured over data, wrote newspaper articles or letters to the editor, or just telephoned to express their thoughts. Eight alternatives were developed, two of which were later dropped from detailed consideration.

In 1998, the concept of the "Rolling Alternative" was born. All communities of interest would work together on this alternative, taking the best pieces of the other alternatives while constantly searching for the best balance among the many conflicting interests in management of the CNF.

The "Rolling Alternative" became Alternative I. Alternative I became the preferred alternative in the draft EIS and the Selected Alternative in this Record of Decision. Alternative I was built by the CNF in close cooperation with citizens and partners who participated in this planning process.

The draft EIS and Proposed Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Cherokee National Forest was released for public comment in February 2003. Over 12,000 letters, e-mails, and postcards were received as comments on the LMPs for the five forests in the southern Appalachians.

After careful reading, review, and consideration of these comments, the interdisciplinary team made necessary changes as they developed the final EIS. Alternative I was modified in response to public comments and incorporated into the final LMP. A detailed summary of public involvement activities is available in Appendix A of the EIS. A list of all the agencies, organizations, and individuals who received copies of the draft EIS, many of whom participated in the planning process, is available in Chapter 5 of the EIS. A summary of comments received on the draft EIS and revised LMP is available in Appendix H of the final EIS.

## **IV. Alternatives**

Seven alternatives were analyzed in detail in the draft EIS. The management theme for each alternative is provided below. A discussion of the environmental effects for the alternatives considered in detail is included in Chapter 3 of the final EIS.

### **A. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED, BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY**

#### **ALTERNATIVE C**

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

Alternative C was eliminated from detailed study because: 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.

#### **ALTERNATIVE H**

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 some timber harvest, but not under a sustainable harvest schedule as is done on suitable forest land. The resource management activities would focus on providing a wide diversity of wildlife habitats. Small human-made openings would be made to mimic natural gap openings. Emphasis would be on forest interior species habitats and these areas would be managed for high to very high scenic integrity.

When the management prescriptions applicable to this alternative were allocated and mapped, there ended up being 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”.

## **B. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL**

### **SELECTED ALTERNATIVE (ALTERNATIVE I)**

Alternative I was developed with extensive public input to address the Forest Service’s Natural Resource Agenda (Watershed Health, Recreation, Sustainable Forest Ecosystem Management, and Forest Roads) and the Regional Forester’s Emphasis Areas (Watershed Health/Water Quality, Habitat for wide-Ranging Species, T&E Recovery Plan, Old Growth, Semi-Primitive/Remote Recreation Opportunities, Roadless Areas, and Lands Suitable for Timber Production).

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 would 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.

Also emphasized would 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 would be a variety of old growth communities to meet biological and social needs. Forest health would 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 would provide high quality, nature-based recreation opportunities, emphasizing non-motorized settings with natural appearing landscapes and those 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, would be protected.

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

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 will be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire dependant communities.

## **ALTERNATIVE A**

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 and public-demand species including game and other species. Developed and dispersed recreation opportunities and high-quality scenery would be provided in a variety of settings both natural and managed. These would include both commercial recreation and increased public access.

Restoration of degraded watersheds would be emphasized to improve aquatic habitats and water quality. Old growth allocation and management would be primarily on lands already withdrawn (in 1986 LMP) from the suitable timber base. 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. Southern Appalachian Assessment inventoried roadless areas adjacent to or in close proximity to wilderness areas that are high-use areas also would be recommended for wilderness designation. Vegetation would be actively managed to reach and maintain a condition of low risk of insect and disease problems, especially in those areas where timber production would be the emphasis, or vegetation management would be permitted. Public access (travelways, use corridors, waterways, trails including off-highway vehicles) would be increased in high-use areas and/or improved to provide for more recreation opportunities.

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 will be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire dependant communities.

## **ALTERNATIVE B**

Alternative B would be biologically driven, emphasize restoring the natural resources and 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 would 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 LMP. A variety of recreation settings would occur in areas compatible with restoration activities and in areas non-restoration areas. Management for wood products would only occur in concert with restoration and creating wildlife habitats. Timber sales would become a by-product of restoration management and wildlife habitats.

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 activities 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 high scenic integrity. A wide variety of recreation opportunities would be provided. Roadless areas with identified 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. Non-native invasives such as beech scale, gypsy moth, hemlock woolly adelgid, Japanese privet, and kudzu would be controlled where feasible. Any restoration needs would be made compatible with wild and scenic river classification and its outstandingly remarkable values. 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.

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 will be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire dependant communities.

#### **ALTERNATIVE D**

Alternative D would be to reach and maintain a balanced age class. All suitable lands 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” or 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 areas would be protected through BMPs, streamside management zones, and standards and restored if needed. Streamside management zones would be included in the suitable timber base, with minimum widths based on applicable regulations.

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 would be seen from roadways and vista points. Potential for roaded natural 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 non-native invasive plant and animal species on suitable lands would be actively controlled and prevented where feasible. Some of the eligible wild and scenic rivers would be recommended for inclusion to the WS&R. Access would be developed, maintained, and used as

needed to meet the goal of balanced age classes, wildlife habitats, and production of timber products.

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 will be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire dependant communities.

### **ALTERNATIVE E**

A natural setting and concentrated facilities would be provided that could attract a variety of recreation users. Resource management activities would be concentrated in certain locations and supports 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 OHV use. A variety of different wildlife habitats would be maintained in blocks across the landscape. Habitat for early successional species would be maintained 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 settings in large, medium, and small patches.

Riparian ecosystems and streamside management zones would be designated, through allocation or standards, 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 WS&R, with primary emphasis on protecting the resources. Public access (travelways, use corridors, waterways, trails including OHV) would be increased in high-use areas and/or improved to provide for more recreation opportunities.

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 will be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire dependant communities.

### **ALTERNATIVE F (NO ACTION)**

Alternative F would continue with current management. Timber management would provide high quality sawtimber. Developed and dispersed recreation opportunities would be provided in a variety of settings. Roadless and wilderness areas would follow guidance of new roads policy. The number of open roads would remain under current management standards. All outstandingly remarkable values for eligible rivers recommended for designation under WSR would be protected. A variety of wildlife habitats would be maintained across the landscape. Protection of rare communities would continue. Species management and protection for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species management would continue. Riparian area management would continue with emphasis from standards.

## **ALTERNATIVE G**

Alternative G would emphasize linking together through land allocations movement corridors and large undisturbed areas, T&E species, 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 around clusters of existing old growth and 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 habitat, 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 (PETS), 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 corridors and reference watersheds. Naturally evolving and naturally appearing landscapes would be predominant. Recreation would take place within a context set by habitat needs and ecosystem function.

Semi-primitive, wildlife, and nature-oriented recreation opportunities would be emphasized. Developed facilities would occur where they do not detract from ecosystem function and landscape connectivity. Roadless areas would be maintained as un-fragmented wildlife habitat, landscape linkages, old growth restoration areas, wilderness designation or proposed wilderness that would maintain their un-fragmented habitat and ecosystem function. Exotic pests would be controlled by means that least impact ecosystem function and un-fragmented habitat across the landscape. Eligible rivers that have outstanding botanical, ecological, fish, aquatic, or wildlife values would be recommended for inclusion to the WS&R.

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 will be utilized to reduce fuel-loading and to maintain fire dependant communities.

## **V. Findings Related to Other Laws and Authorities**

I have considered the statutes governing management of the CNF, and I believe that this decision represents the best possible approach to both harmonizing and reconciling the current statutory duties of the Forest Service.

## **CLEAN AIR STANDARDS**

As discussed in the EIS, Chapter 3, Physical Resources, Air Resources, all lands managed by the CNF are currently in attainment with National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Compliance

with air quality statutes is directed in the LMP, Chapter 2, Watersheds: Water, Soil, Air, and Aquatic Species; Chapter 2, Fire Management; and Chapter 2, Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers.

### **CLEAN WATER ACT**

The revised LMP contains direction to ensure all projects comply with the requirements of the Clean Water Act. A watershed assessment was completed to show the current condition of streams and watersheds on the CNF. The results of this assessment informed direction in the LMP. This direction is found in the LMP, Chapter 2, Watersheds: Water, Soil, Air, and Aquatic Species and Chapter 3, Management Prescription 11: Riparian Corridors. Analysis of sediment yields and cumulative effects for water quality and associated beneficial uses is discussed in the EIS, Chapter 3, Physical Resources, Water Resources.

### **NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT**

In accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, LMPs are not undertakings under the National Historic Preservation Act. Consultation pursuant to Section 106 of the Act is not required at the LMP level. As discussed in the Social/Economic Environment, Heritage Resource section of Chapter 3 of the EIS, activities in the revised LMP will be in compliance with the Act. Conformance with the Act is directed in the revised LMP in Chapter 2, Heritage Resources. Additional direction is provided in FSM 2360.

### **ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT**

This decision is made with the benefit of extensive consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the Revised Forest Plan and EIS. The USFWS was a partner in completing species viability assessments and helping develop wildlife habitat objectives. They were provided advanced copies of the Revised Forest Plan, FEIS and the Biological Assessment (BA). Their recommendations were included in the final plan. The BA assessed effects to federally-designated proposed, threatened or endangered species that occur or could occur on the Forests. The USFWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination of effects in the BA that implementation of Alternative I for the Forest Plan Revision is "not likely to adversely affect" federally-listed endangered or threatened species or their habitats.

Further consultation with USFWS will be part of site-specific evaluations for project-level decisions.

### **ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE**

On January 12, 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) was published in the Federal Register (36 CFR 294). The Roadless Area Conservation Rule prohibited with certain exceptions, road construction and reconstruction activities; and the timber cutting, sale, or removal activities that could occur in the inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) identified in the RACR FEIS. The RACR in 36 CFR 294.12 and 294.13, identified the exceptions where road

construction/reconstruction activities and timber cutting/removal activities would be allowed. The RACR had an effective date of March 13, 2001. This effective date was later delayed until May 12, 2001.

Subsequently, several groups and states filed lawsuits challenging the RACR. On July 14, 2003, the United States District Court, Wyoming District (Judge Clarence Brimmer) found the Roadless Area Conservation Rule to be in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act, and permanently enjoined its implementation and set the rule aside. The effect of this ruling is that direction for inventoried roadless areas reverts to the direction provided in the LMP. However, this issue is not settled. Appeals of the Wyoming District Court decision, other litigation, new rulemaking, or new Forest Service directives could result in a change in direction for the management of inventoried roadless areas.

The management approach in this revised LMP emphasizes conservation of roadless values and characteristics in all of the inventoried roadless areas. However, about 93 percent of the roadless acres would allow timber cutting/removal activities or road construction/reconstruction activities that do not meet the intent of the RACR. (See the discussion on Issue #8 in this Record of Decision, and the section on “Roadless Area Conservation Rule” in Chapter 3 of the EIS, for more information).

In managing the roadless areas, the CNF will follow the management direction contained in this revised LMP and any Forest Service policy on roadless area management specified in the Forest Service directives. However, should the RACR become effective, it will supercede this revised LMP for those inventoried roadless areas identified in the RACR FEIS that was completed in November 2000. This would mean that those areas in the revised LMP that are identified as available for treatment, could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the RACR. According to 36 CFR 294.14(b), should the RACR become effective, an amendment to this revised LMP would not be needed to implement its direction.

#### **OTHER FOREST SERVICE DECISIONS WITH MANAGEMENT DIRECTION**

Other decisions that apply to the management of the Forest are included in the Records of Decision for the Gypsy Moth EIS, and the Southern Pine Beetle EIS.

### **VI. Implementation**

The direction in this Forest Plan will become effective 30 days after the publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Final Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register.

Under NFMA, “permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy” of National Forest System lands are required to be “consistent” with the current Land and Resource Management Plan [16 U.S.C. 1604(i)]. In the LMP revision context, NFMA specifically qualifies the requirement in three ways: 1) these documents must be revised only “when necessary”, 2) these documents must be revised “as soon as practicable”, and 3) any revisions are “subject to valid existing rights”.

In developing this revised LMP, implementing pre-existing decisions and the associated effects of that implementation were considered part of the baseline against which the alternatives were evaluated. Because these earlier decisions were considered in our effects analysis, their

implementation is not in conflict with the revised LMP. Exercising my discretion under NFMA, I have determined that it is not “necessary” to apply the revised LMP’s standards retroactively, and I find that NFMA does not require revision of these pre-existing use and occupancy authorizations. As soon as practicable after approval of the revised LMP, the Forest Supervisor shall ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the revised LMP. On a case-by-case basis, the Forest Supervisor shall exercise his/her sound discretion in determining when such consistency is practicable.

“Use and occupancy” agreements include contracts for timber harvesting. Most timber sale decisions are implemented through a three-year contract. While a timber sale contract is a valid existing right, the terms of the contract allow modification. Therefore, modification of a timber contract under its terms would not violate the “valid existing right” provision. Nevertheless, I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the revised LMP. As stated earlier, these contracts were considered part of the baseline against which the alternatives were evaluated. Finally, existing timber contracts will generally have been completed within three years. The decision will be left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify any decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other classes of “use and occupancy” agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the revised LMP.

The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the revised LMP. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed previously, these activities are site-specific and may require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the revised LMP.

Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outputs specified in the revised LMP are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.

All activities, many of which are interdependent, may be affected by annual budgets. However, the goals, objectives, standards, management prescriptions, and monitoring questions described in the revised LMP may not change unless the LMP is amended.

The LMP will be amended or revised to adjust to changing circumstances. For example, the management goals, objectives, and standards stated for the Cherokee National Forest in the revised LMP may, in the near future, be in need of updating or amendment in order to come in line with later assessments or analyses. The amendment process gives us the flexibility to adapt the decisions made today to the realities of tomorrow. We will provide opportunities to the public to be involved in future changes to the revised LMP.

The monitoring and evaluation program is the quality-control system for a LMP. This program is described in Chapter 5, “Monitoring and Evaluation,” of the revised LMP. Monitoring and evaluation is emphasized in this revision and will provide us with information on the progress that we making toward the management goals and objectives. This information will be evaluated and used to update inventory data, to improve current and future mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the revised LMP. Evaluation of monitoring results is directly linked to the decision maker’s ability to respond to changing

conditions, emerging trends, public concerns, and new information and technology. No single monitoring item or parameter automatically triggers a change in revised LMP direction. An interdisciplinary approach is used to evaluate information and decide what changes are needed.

Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to revised LMP goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, and specific regulatory requirements. Not every goal, objective, and standard can be monitored. Relevancy to issues, compliance with legal and agency policy, scientific credibility, administrative feasibility, land- and short-term budget considerations, and impact on workforce all influence monitoring priorities

A range of acceptable approaches has been identified to monitor and evaluate the forestwide status and trends of habitats and populations for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species or for those species selected as management indicator species. One or more of these approaches that can be applied in monitoring a species include: 1) measurement of habitat conditions and trends for species, 2) the use of population occurrence data, 3) the use of population indices to track relative population trends, 4) actual population estimates and demographic information usually reserved for some federally listed species of high risk globally impaired species, and 5) development of research studies to determine species/habitat relationships and species responses to conditions created by land management activities.

Each monitoring question has one or more monitoring items to answer the question. For each monitoring question, a monitoring task sheet has been developed. These task sheets are used develop the details, priorities, and budgeting for answering the monitoring questions. The task sheets are not part of my decision. Changes to task sheets will not require a revised LMP amendment.

Public participation is vital as we monitor our progress. We will work with partners and cooperators in developing and carrying out monitoring activities. Activities, findings, and results will be evaluated and reports will be available for the public at least annually. The public may review the results and recommend changes based on monitoring findings.

The revised LMP is a dynamic instrument that can be changed with appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. Through the life of the revised LMP, amendments may be needed to incorporate new information, new policy and direction, or changing values and resource conditions. Amendments will keep the revised LMP current, relevant, and responsive to agency and public concerns. Amendments are needed whenever any of the revised LMP decisions should be changed due to any or the above conditions. The revised LMP also can be amended for specific projects if during project design it is determined that the best method of meeting goals and objectives conflicts with existing plan direction.

Amendments may be significant or non-significant. The Forest Supervisor may implement non-significant amendments to the revised LMP after appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. The Regional Forester approves significant amendments.

## VII. Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 217. A written appeal of this decision must be filed in duplicate within 90 days of the date of the published legal notice. Appeals must be filed with:

USDA Forest Service  
Attn: NFS-EMC Staff (Barbara Timberlake)  
Stop Code 1104  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-1104

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR part 217;
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant;
- Identification of the decision to which the appeal is being made;
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which appeal is made
- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Requests to stay implementation of the revised LMP will not be granted [36 CFR 217.10(a)]

Final decisions on proposed projects will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation and in compliance with NEPA. Project decisions may be subject to appeal at that time.

For questions concerning the appeal process, contact:

USDA Forest Service  
Attention: Ecosystem Management Staff (Steve Segovia)  
P.O. Box 96090  
Washington, D.C. 20090-6090  
(202) 205-1066

For questions concerning the Cherokee National Forest LMP, contact:

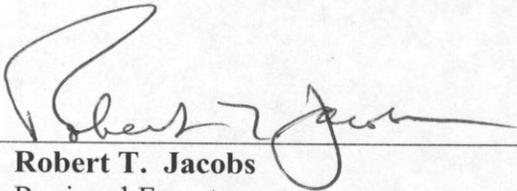
Anne J. Zimmermann  
Forest Supervisor  
Cherokee National Forest  
P.O. Box 2010 (2800 North Ocoee Street)  
Cleveland, TN 37320  
423-476-9700

Reviewers are encouraged to contact the Forest Supervisor before submitting appeals to determine if misunderstandings or concerns can be clarified or resolved.

### VIII. Approval

I am pleased to announce my decision and bring this phase of forest planning to completion. This LMP has been built on a strong foundation of citizen collaboration and the best available science.

As we move forward we will carefully monitor our activities, the condition of the land, the goods and services produced, and the effectiveness of the resource protection measures included in the revised LMP. I anticipate that implementation of the plan will be conducted in the same spirit of partnership that has characterized this revision process. Working together we can meet the challenges, realize the opportunities, and achieve the goals and objectives of the Cherokee Land and Resource Management Plan.



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**Robert T. Jacobs**  
Regional Forester  
Southern Region  
USDA, Forest Service

1/15/04

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Date