



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service
Southern Region

Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan

Sumter National Forest



The picnic shelter on the cover was originally named the Charles Suber Recreational Unit and was planned in 1936. The lake and picnic area including a shelter were built in 1938-1939. The original shelter was found inadequate and a modified model B-3500 shelter was constructed probably by the CCC from camp F-6 in 1941. The name of the recreation area was changed in 1956 to Molly's Rock Picnic Area, which was the local unofficial name. The name originates from a sheltered place between and under two huge boulders once inhabited by an African-American woman named Molly.

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**Record of Decision
Environmental Impact Statement
For the**

Sumter National Forest

Land and Resource Management Plan

Sumter National Forest (Abbeville, Chester, Edgefield, Fairfield, Greenwood, Laurens, McCormick, Newberry, Oconee, Saluda, and Union Counties)

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INTRODUCTION

This public Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the *Revised Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan) for the Sumter National Forest.

The Sumter National Forest (Sumter NF) includes approximately 362,000 acres of National Forest System land in the mountains and piedmont of South Carolina. The forest is divided into three ranger districts located in 11 counties. The Andrew Pickens District is in western Oconee County. The Enoree District is located east of Interstate 26 in Chester, Fairfield, Laurens, Newberry, and Union Counties. The Long Cane District lies east of J. Strom Thurmond Lake in Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood, McCormick, and Saluda Counties.

MY DECISION

I selected Alternative I from the *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan* (FEIS) for the Sumter NF. By selecting Alternative I, the Forest Plan describes in detail the goals, objectives, standards, management area direction, suitable lands and recommendations for additions to wilderness is also approved.

The Forest Plan considers economic and resource values and recognizes the importance of all natural resources, as well as the continued availability of goods and services the public expects from the forest. Although none of the alternatives considered would satisfy everyone completely, Alternative I strikes a balance among competing interests to achieve the maximum net public benefits from forest resources in an environmentally sensitive manner. The Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability. The Forest Plan meets our moral, ethical, and legal obligations to the people and environment. The rate at which the Forest Plan will be implemented is based on annual funding actually received by the forest. Attaining desired conditions in some areas and the associated outputs may be prolonged or reduced if funding is decreased.

This decision applies only to the Sumter NF 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 forest are considered.

A Forest Plan is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Resource Planning Act (RPA). National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires all forests in the National Forest System to develop plans that direct resource management activities. These plans are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10-to-15 year cycle. The previous Land and Resource Management Plan was approved in 1985, and work to revise began in 1996.

COMPONENTS OF THE DECISION

The FEIS and Forest Plan were developed according to NFMA implementing regulations, 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations, 40 CFR 1500-1508.

The Forest Plan 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 and concerns. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies and how they respond to issues and concerns. 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 provide for multiple use and sustained yield of the products and services people use from the Forest, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, water, wildlife, fish, and wilderness. The Forest Plan 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 provide the specific information used to develop projects to implement the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan establishes management areas in Chapter 4 and displays them on a map at the front of this Chapter. The management prescriptions are described in Chapter 3 and displayed on a map at the front of this Chapter. [36 CFR 219.11(c)]
3. **Standards**, which set the sideboards for achieving the goals, objectives and desired conditions, as well as provide meaningful direction when implementing projects. The Forest Plan contains standards that apply across the entire Forest in Chapter 2 and those that apply to specific areas of the Forest in Chapters 3 and 4. [36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27]
4. The designation of **lands suitable** for timber production is found in Chapter 2 and Appendix D of the Sumter Revised Forest Plan. Approximately 259,000 acres, or 71 percent of the national forest is designated suitable for timber production. The maximum harvesting levels (or **Allowable Sale Quantity**) is found in Chapter 2 of the Forest Plan and is determined to be 139 million cubic feet or 763 million board feet for the next 10 years. [36CFR 219.14) and 36 CFR 219.16]
5. **Wilderness study areas** recommended to Congress. I am recommending one addition to existing wilderness. [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 Forest Plan. [36 CFR 219.11(d)].

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

My decision to select Alternative I for implementation is based on a careful and reasoned comparison of the response of each alternative to the 14 significant issues. These issues represent the multiple uses and conflicting demands of the Sumter NF, located in the Piedmont and Blue Ridge mountains of South Carolina near the communities of Edgefield, Newberry, and Walhalla, South Carolina.

The selected alternative continues the multiple-use management that has directed management of this forest since its inception and resulted in the wonderful array of resources that we now manage. This alternative provides a strong environmental and resource ethic to continue the long history of land restoration and still meets many of the desires of public interest on at least a portion of the national forest. Some resource uses and public interests do directly conflict with each other, but a significant number can co-exist very well when we do a quality job of planning their location, design and maintenance. For those that do conflict, we have areas allocated to emphasize certain resources. We have areas where no commercial activity is allowed: these areas meet the need for solitude, scenic beauty, and natural processes. We have other areas where commercial timber harvest helps achieve wildlife objectives while producing wood products and improving hunting opportunities and hiking trails. We have areas on the piedmont where producing high quality sawtimber is the emphasis.

Of course, the underpinning that holds multiple use management together is proper protection of the basic resources of soil and water. The Selected Alternative fully protects water quality throughout the forest through standards including best management practices (BMP) that direct precautions to limit soil and water effects whenever management activities are prescribed. The Forest Plan maintains consistency with all laws, regulations, executive orders and other agency directives and requirements. Maintaining and restoring forest health and habitat for the native species of plants and animals that live on the Forest is also a cornerstone of the Forest Plan.

My reasons for choosing the selected alternative are discussed below by issue. They explain why I believe Alternative I, as described in the FEIS, will maximize net public benefits when compared to the other alternatives. Chapter 3 of the FEIS describes in detail the effects of expected management actions on the various forest resources. How each of these factors was considered in my decision is detailed below:

Issue #1 Terrestrial Plants and Animals and Their Associated Habitats

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Implement management of National Forest lands to restore, maintain or improve composition and structure of native plant communities and to provide habitat conditions for wildlife species found in forested landscapes;
- Provide specific habitat conditions necessary to maintain viable populations of plant, animal, and fish species found in the planning area. Provide adequate amounts and a

distribution of habitats to support overwintering and migratory species, as well as desirable levels of selected species to address demands for wildlife-based recreation activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, photography, conservation education).

Over the last two decades the Sumter NF has seen a decline in early successional forests, fire adapted plant communities, specialized habitat conditions, and wildlife species associated with them. These habitats are important to maintain viability and support the variety of wildlife species found on the forest. Alternatives F, A, and D provide the most early successional habitat conditions with Alternatives B and G the least. Alternative I ranks fourth.

While all management prescriptions provide some habitat for various wildlife species, management prescriptions 8.A.1, 8.A.2, 8.B.2, 8.C, and 8.D reflect an emphasis in this area. Alternatives B and E allocate the most acres to this emphasis with Alternative F the least. Alternative I ranks third.

All alternatives restore natural communities and habitats to some degree through prescribed fire and a variety of silvicultural treatments. Alternatives B and E have the most acres with this emphasis, and Alternative G the least. Alternative I ranks third.

I have chosen the Selected Alternative because it emphasizes management of forest ecosystems through restoration and maintenance, and provides for sustainable and diverse ecosystems that support viable plant, wildlife, and fish populations. Habitat conditions that are suitable for maintaining populations of all vertebrate species native to the planning area will be emphasized. A variety of early successional habitats would be created and maintained.

Specifically the Selected Alternative increases the amount of early successional forests, wetlands, the acres available for wildlife management; restores native habitats such as woodland, savanna, and open grassland; maintains many fire-dependent habitats including Dry-Mesic Oak forest, Dry and Xeric Oak forest, Shortleaf Pine/Pitch Pine/Pine-Oak forest and Loblolly Pine-Oak; shortleaf pine, shortleaf pine/oak communities; and restores rare communities such as table mountain pine and canebrakes.

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

The Forest Plan strives to:

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

All of the alternatives analyzed in detail protect and recover threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and provide habitat for the wide variety of other species that also inhabit our forest. I have chosen the Selected Alternative because it employs strong conservation measures to protect or actively restore habitat for all native plants and animals. For example, in the Turkey and Upper Stevens Creek watersheds, secondary riparian corridors have been designated that extend beyond the fixed prescription width to give additional protection to the habitat and populations of the endangered freshwater mussel, Carolina heelsplitter (*Lasmigona decorata*).

This management strategy is consistent with recovery plans approved by the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service.

Issue #3 Old Growth

The Forest Plan strives to:

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

All of the alternatives manage and protect the small amount of existing old growth. Alternative G provides the most future old growth with Alternative F the least. Alternative I ranks fourth.

I have chosen the Selected Alternative because it manages and protects all existing old growth and allocates over 95,000 acres for the development of future old growth compared with only 17,500 acres under Alternative F.

Some who commented on the Draft EIS and Proposed Forest Plan felt Alternative I did not go far enough in providing old growth forests for the future. Under this alternative old growth communities that we have currently identified and existing old growth we identify in the future will be protected and managed. Managing the age distribution of our forests requires a balanced approach that considers a wide variety of needs and circumstances. Some species need younger forests in order to survive. Older forests may be attacked by insects and diseases and need to be treated so these threats do not spread. I have chosen Alternative I because it responds best to this natural variation.

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

The Forest Plan strives to:

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

Every alternative considered includes standards and best management practices to ensure recreation, timber, transportation, wildlife, fire, minerals, and other uses are regulated and controlled to protect the quality of the water flowing from the Sumter NF. Included with these protections is the intent to protect soil productivity and continue to improve soil conditions in

areas affected by historic land uses and associated erosion. Alternatives A, B, D, E, G, and the Selected Alternative take this a step further in management prescription 11 to protect the moist bottomland forests (riparian areas) and nearby uplands in steep or confined valleys along our streams, lakes, rivers, and wetlands. The resultant riparian corridors include the perennial and intermittent streams, a fixed buffer zone with field adjustment option for site conditions, floodplains and mesic terraces. Added forest wide measures are also included to modify ground disturbing and other activities near actively scouring ephemeral stream channels.

In the current Forest Plan, riparian management is appropriate for timber management, but controlled through Forest Standards and best management practices (BMP) being applied within streamside management zones (SMZ) to protect and maintain water quality. The Revised Forest Plan establishes the *riparian corridor* that includes all riparian areas, wetlands and a variable width border around water bodies including perennial and intermittent streams. The acreage within the riparian corridor ranges from approximately 13,400 acres in Alternative F (current management) to over 62,000 acres in all the other Alternatives. The width of the riparian corridor varies by slope but is at least 100 feet on each side of a stream for perennial streams and 50 feet for intermittent streams, which is generally wider than streamside management zones. Riparian corridor widths can be increased or reduced to fit individual circumstances with site-specific evaluations. The riparian corridors are classified as unsuitable for timber production. Instead, they will be managed to restore some of the ecological functions and benefits that have been degraded or lost. Best management practices will continue to be applied within the corridors.

The Forest Plan contains forest-wide direction to ensure management activities maintain or improve watershed conditions and protect aquatic habitats (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 2, Watershed Management). Standards have been included in Chapter 2 to address protection on ephemeral streams. Objectives are added to focus attention to desired activities to meet this end.

Management activities within drainages in close proximity or affecting conditions applicable to streams identified as impaired on the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control 303(d) or 305(b) lists will be coordinated with the state and/or Environmental Protection Agency efforts to address the impaired stream concerns. As in the past, interaction from our technical staff will help support BMP and total mean daily load analysis with regulatory agencies and implementation with forest neighbors interested in improving water quality conditions.

I selected Alternative I because of the strong emphasis placed on protecting, maintaining, improving and restoring water quality, stream stability, aquatic habitats, riparian areas and watersheds of high public interest (eg. Chattooga, Turkey, Upper Stevens and Chauga).

Issue #5 Wood Products

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Determine where forest management activities are needed and appropriate to achieve the desired composition, structure, and function of forest ecosystems; a result of such activities will also be to provide a sustainable supply of wood products for local needs;
- Provide supplies of wood products when the Forest Service is in a unique position to make an impact on meeting the demand for those products.

Concern about the amount of timber production from the Forest remains high. Public opinion continues to be divided on this issue. Many recognize that forestry is a leading industry in South Carolina, and timber production has significant economic impacts regionally and locally. Many feel that resources such as recreation, tourism and wildlife provide much greater benefits to the economy than wood products. However, these resources also benefit from timber management.

Table 2-7 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives respond differently to this issue during the first decade. Alternative F provides the highest level of wood products, followed by Alternatives A and D (A and D have identical allowable sale quantities), then Alternative I. Alternatives E, B, and G had the lower levels of wood products, G being the lowest. The acreages identified as suitable for timber production were in roughly the same order by alternative. The Forest Plan identifies approximately 259,313 acres as suitable for timber production, and set the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) at 156 MMCF (million cubic feet) in the first decade.

I believe that the Selected Alternative best balances the need to provide appropriate levels of sustainable timber yields while addressing the other significant issues. The flow of wood products from the Sumter NF will be a result of meeting the desired conditions in the management prescriptions. Forest management activities will be needed and are appropriate to achieve the desired composition, structure, and function of forest ecosystems.

The portion of piedmont lands that the selected alternative allocates to management prescription 10.B – High Quality Forest Products is not only appropriate, but also, I believe, the best choice. Management prescription 10.B is one of the very few management prescriptions that has early successional percentages consistent with moderate (as opposed to extended) rotation ages for loblolly pine, which will remain the dominant species in most of these piedmont areas. As part of the composite of allocations, management prescription 10.B will provide a good mixture of habitats, a good flow of high quality forest products, and help maintain a healthy forest.

Issue #6 Aesthetics/Scenery Management

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Protect and enhance the scenic and aesthetic values of national forest lands in the Southern Appalachians.
- Manage national forests to provide a variety of landscape character themes with the predominant themes being natural appearing, natural evolving, and variations of these themes.

Alternative E has the most acres assigned to high and very high scenic integrity objectives. Alternative F has the least with Alternative I ranked fourth.

I have chosen the Selected Alternative because it protects the high value of scenic landscapes on the Sumter NF. Through the application of the revised Scenery Management System (SMS), lands were inventoried and landscapes that are highly valued by people are retained or less

altered. The array of prescriptions (and subsequent assigned scenic integrity objectives) within each alternative was the biggest difference among alternatives. I believe Alternative I meets the goal of high scenic integrity.

Issue #7 Recreation Opportunities/Experience

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Provide a spectrum of high quality, nature-based recreation settings and opportunities that are not widely available on non-federal lands;
- Meet the following recreation needs within the capabilities of the land:
 - Hiking, biking, and equestrian trail systems, especially in non-motorized settings with high quality landscapes. (Provide separate-use trails where necessary to reduce user conflicts or to improve the quality of recreation experiences.)
 - Designated OHV routes.
 - High priority improvements, expansions, or additions of facilities providing developed recreation opportunities.
 - Hunting, fishing, and non-consumptive wildlife opportunities.
 - Improved interpretive opportunities or other special recreation needs locally identified.

The Sumter National Forest will manage some areas to provide "backcountry" (semi-primitive/remote) recreational experiences that are not available on other land ownerships. Although the opportunities for outdoor recreation are extensive and the public demand for these opportunities is seemingly endless, the forest's capability to meet these demands is neither static nor endless. Visitor preferences can shift over time, and both changing financial limitations and environmental impacts must be considered. To maximize value to the public with the limited resources available, the forest will focus on providing those recreational opportunities that are unique or of exceptional long-term value in a manner that focuses on maximizing visitor satisfaction within financial and environmental limitations. A goal is to provide a spectrum of high quality nature-based recreation settings and opportunities that reflect the unique or exceptional resources of the Forest and the interests of the recreating public on an environmentally sound and financially sustainable basis. Management of recreation facilities and opportunities will adapt as needed to shift limited resources to those opportunities.

Alternative I has the most acres allocated to dispersed recreation prescriptions 7.A, 7.D, 7.E.1 and 7.E.2 with Alternative G the least. I selected Alternative I because it significantly increases recreation opportunities, especially trail and backcountry, when compared to the other alternatives. It also responds to hunting opportunities by continuing to manage for early successional habitats and increasing woodland/savanna cover types.

Issue #8 Roadless Areas and Wilderness Management

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Manage wilderness and roadless areas to provide their full range of social and ecological benefits;
- Provide that roadless character of inventoried roadless areas is maintained so as to continue to meet Forest Service roadless area criteria, regardless of their allocation;
- Continue to protect and manage existing wilderness areas.

Alternatives A, G, and I maintain the roadless character on all inventoried roadless areas with Alternatives D and F maintaining the roadless character on approximately 50%. Alternatives B and G recommend all inventoried roadless areas for designation as wilderness study areas with Alternatives D and I recommending two of the four.

I have chosen the Selected Alternative because it strengthens management of the existing wilderness, Ellicott Rock. Alternative I recommends that two of the four adjacent inventoried roadless areas, Ellicott Rock I and II, receive wilderness designation. On the remaining two roadless areas the roadless character is maintained. Most of Big Mountain Roadless Area which is shared with the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests in Georgia is within wild sections of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River. Road construction and vegetative manipulation in this area is limited. The Bee Cove roadless area is allocated to management prescription 4F (Scenic Area). This allocation does allow some fire protection and wildlife management but the roadless characteristics would be maintained.

Issue #9 Forest Health

The Forest Plan strives to:

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

Many aspects of this issue are addressed under issues 1, 2, 3, 4, and 10. Table 2-12 in the FEIS summarizes how the alternatives respond to this issue in terms of insect and disease concerns, prescribed fire, and restoration.

I have chosen the Selected Alternative for the following reasons: First, it would permit use of prescribed fire to the maximum extent I believe feasible for the Sumter NF. The Forest Plan contains goals, standards and desired conditions that will promote prescribed fire as an ecosystem process, reduce the risk of wildfire, and at the same time protect soil, air and property.

Second, it provides a restoration emphasis on significant portions of Sumter NF lands. Third, it commits the Sumter NF to managing species on the Regional Forester's invasive species list, including discontinuing the practice of planting such species. Fourth, though it is not the alternative most responsive to insect and disease concerns, it does address them moderately well, while at the same time responding to other significant issues. Last, it addresses stand density concerns both in desired conditions, and in a forest-wide objective.

Issue #10 Special Areas and Rare Communities

The Forest Plan strives to:

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

All alternatives protect rare communities. However, Alternative I emphasizes this protection through specific allocations to management prescriptions 4.D (Botanical/zoological areas) 4.F (Scenic Areas) and 9.F (Rare Communities). I have chosen the selected alternative for this reason.

Issue #11 Wild and Scenic Rivers

The Forest Plan addresses this issue by striving to:

- Protect the outstandingly remarkable values and free-flowing condition of the Wild, Scenic, and Recreation Rivers that are designated by Congress or are eligible for designation.

The Chattooga River is the only Wild and Scenic designated stream on the Sumter National Forest.

I have chosen the selected alternative because it protects the outstandingly remarkable values of the eight eligible rivers on the Sumter NF and maintains their free flow. Before recommendation to Congress, eligible rivers must be found suitable through an analysis process. Suitability was not completed for any eligible river during the planning process and therefore, all the outstandingly remarkable values and free-flowing nature for all eligible rivers must be protected until that step is accomplished. Each alternative was similar in that respect.

However, in Alternative I an emphasis was placed on Turkey and Stevens Creeks on the Long Cane Ranger District. The rivers will be studied for suitability by 2008. The rivers were placed in an expanded botanical/zoological prescription, (4D).

Issue#12 Access and Road Management

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Provide a transportation system that supplies and improves access for all forest road users within the capabilities of the land;
- Provide a minimum transportation system that supplies safe and efficient access for forest users while protecting forest resources;
- 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.

Federal regulations require the Forest Service to identify the minimum road system needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, utilization, and protection of National Forest System lands, using a science-based roads analysis at the appropriate scale. The forest has dedicated considerable effort to analyzing the road system for the minimum requirements. The recent requirement for a scientific based “Road Analysis Process” has been completed at the forest-scale. The forest-scale roads analysis was not intended to analyze all roads (classified and unclassified) on national forest lands. There are multiple scales at which roads analysis may be conducted to inform road management decisions. Roads analysis at the forest-scale provides the context for informing road management decisions and activities at the watershed, area and project level. Outcomes of roads analysis at the project-scale would identify needed and unneeded roads which require a site specific analysis.

Every alternative addresses this issue the same way. Thus, selection of Alternative I was not controlled by the road access issue because roads are a support to all other forest resources and users.

Issue #13 Chattooga River Watershed

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Manage the Chattooga Watershed for desired social and ecological benefits while protecting the outstanding values of the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River corridor.

My decision for the management of this watershed involves coordination between the Sumter, Chattahoochee-Oconee, and Nantahala National Forests. The Sumter NF is designated as the lead administrative entity for management of boating on the Wild and Scenic River on the channel separating the states of South Carolina and Georgia. I am selecting Alternative I because it provides direction to protect the Chattooga Wild and Scenic River, while also addressing the needs of the multi-state watershed to provide multiple uses and ecological restoration where needed.

Congress designated 57 miles of the Chattooga River, located in Georgia, North Carolina and

South Carolina as a component of the National Wild and Scenic River System in 1974. The headwaters of the river begin in North Carolina and form the boundary between Georgia and South Carolina downriver. The river corridor and its immediate surroundings offer many recreational uses. Recreational boating (kayaking, canoeing, and rafting) has been a popular use of the river for many years, and includes both guided and self-guided users.

The uses of the river are regulated by the Wild and Scenic River Act, and respond to seasonal changes, water level and type of use (commercial and private). Boating uses are currently allowed downstream of the Highway 28 Bridge to Tugaloo Lake. Alternative I will continue to permit this use designation.

I considered options for boating on the Chattooga River above the Highway 28 bridge. Alternatives A and E analyzed two different approaches to this issue. Both of these alternatives would likely have impacts on the social and physical resources on these portions of the river. Remoteness and solitude are both integral values associated with experiences above Highway 28, particularly in the Ellicott Rock Wilderness Area. Achieving solitude in these areas has become increasingly difficult for hikers, backpackers, anglers, and others as use increases. Adding a new user group would make this even more difficult to achieve. It is likely that boating above Highway 28 would disturb users who have become accustomed to or who have come to expect the absence of boaters. Other negative impacts that could be expected if boating were to be permitted include new user-created access paths and trails, and expansion of the segment of river where search and rescue responses would likely be needed.

There currently are adequate opportunities for “creek boating” experiences in the area, including the Chattooga River, therefore I concluded that continuing to exclude boating above Highway 28 is the best way to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values associated with the entire Chattooga River for the next 10-15 years.

The Chattooga River watershed also provides a wide range of multiple uses on National Forest lands. Alternative I will implement several management options for the lands and resources of the watershed including old growth, wildlife habitat needs, backcountry, restoring vegetation associations, and providing high quality water for recreation and fisheries. A recent effort to address the restoration of watershed conditions has involved a cooperative effort of agencies and landowners to address problems on a large-scale watershed basis.

Issue #14 Minerals

The Forest Plan strives to:

- Meet demands for energy and non-energy minerals consistent with forest plan management prescriptions.

The United States holds title to all of the minerals beneath ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of the forest. The remaining mineral rights are considered outstanding. Outstanding mineral rights are property rights that were established and separated from the surface estate before the Forest Service’s acquisition of the surface estate.

All the alternatives would allow over ninety-five percent of the forest to be available for mineral leasing. The management prescriptions allocated within each alternative identify where no surface use, controlled surface occupancy, and standard stipulations are applied. The decision of whether or not to allow leasing and mineral extraction is not made in this Forest Plan but requires a site specific analysis incorporating the stipulations described above. Thus, selection of Alternative I was not controlled by this issue.

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.

Many of the alternatives address historic and cultural uses of the forest, as well as protection and enhancement of the natural resources that exist on the forest. I used ground disturbing activities as the main indicator for the least damage to the biological and physical environment, and the primary criteria for determining the environmentally preferable alternative.

Alternative G is the environmentally preferable alternative. This alternative provides the least amount of developmental activity, and programs the least amount of ground disturbing activity during the next 10 to 15 years. Alternative G would schedule the least amount of timber harvest, associated road development, and create the least negative human-induced change to the natural environment including effects to soil productivity and increases in sediment yield. Alternative G would have the most acres allocated to existing and future old growth. 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 between the social, economic, physical, and biological environment. It provides the best balance between negative environmental effects and positive effects from human management of natural resources.

Many components of Alternatives G are incorporated in Alternative I, such as full protection of rare communities; streamside and riparian areas; threatened, endangered, sensitive, and locally rare species habitat and watersheds. Alternative I would provide more flexibility than Alternative G to manage habitats for a variety of wildlife species that need early successional habitat. Also, Alternative I would provide opportunities to improve overall forest health by effectively restoring native plant communities and lessening potential losses to insects and disease.

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' PNV, is shown in Table 3-150 of the FEIS. As shown in the table, Alternatives A, E, and D have higher PNV than the Selected Alternative. 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, or on estimated values from Forest Service research for non-market amenities like wildlife and recreation.

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 and non-market valued commodities as other alternatives considered in the FEIS. However, I believe Alternative I achieves a balance between the economic benefits and environmental issues and concerns voiced by the American people. I believe the Selected Alternative will increase public benefits by moving the Forest towards improved forest health through its emphasis on restoring native landscape diversity and unique plant and animal habitats. I am also confident that the management proposed in the Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and can be accomplished.

CHANGES BETWEEN DRAFT AND FINAL EIS

After the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, many changes to Alternative I were made to respond to public comments and improve the management direction. Important changes are described below.

1. Riparian prescription (Management Prescription 11) was modified to clarify the direction for the determination of riparian corridors during implementation. Minimum width slope classes were changed to 0-30 percent and the riparian acres were re-estimated.
2. Added a goal, objective and standard to address the issue of instream flows.
3. Added two new recently purchased parcels of land: one on the Andrew Pickens District; the other on the Enoree District.

4. Updated the management direction on the Chattooga River Corridor in order to incorporate Amendment #14 of the 1985 Forest Plan and be consistent with the Chattahoochee and Nantahala National Forests. This is reflected in desired conditions and standards in management prescriptions 2.A, 2.A.1, 2.A.2, and 2.A.3. Additional management direction was also added to the Chattooga River Watershed in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan in terms of desired conditions.
5. Turkey and Stevens Creeks are no longer recommended for wild and scenic river designation since the suitability analysis was not completed. We defined an objective in the Forest Plan to complete this analysis within 5 years. These areas are now allocated to management prescription 4.D (Botanical-Zoological Area).
6. Additional goal, objective and standards were added to chapter 2 of the Forest Plan to protect the outstandingly remarkable values of the eight rivers that are presently eligible for Wild and Scenic river designation.
7. Objectives 7.07 through 7.10 for fire dependent communities in the Forest Plan have been combined into one objective and moved under Goal 20.
8. Mineral leasing and restrictions to mineral development through no surface occupancy and controlled surface occupancy are now defined in the glossary. An appendix was added to the Forest Plan to explain how a mining proposal is evaluated at the project level.
9. Desired conditions for the four management areas in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan have been expanded.
10. Updated the Management Indicator Species.
11. Updated the monitoring elements in Appendix E of the Forest Plan to better address the Forest Plan objectives.
12. Updated and moved the list of research needs in Appendix G to Chapter 5 of the Forest Plan.
13. Changed management prescriptions 7A (Scenic Byway) and 2A3 (Designated Recreation River) to unsuitable for timber production.
14. Updated estimates for the Allowable Sale Quantity and Long Term Sustained Yield by re-running the Spectrum model.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Generally, the Sumter National Forest's approach to public involvement centered on meaningful and ongoing involvement. Frequently going above and beyond the legal requirements for public involvement, the interdisciplinary team worked to foster an ongoing dialogue with groups, agencies, and individuals, providing for a two-way dialogue rather than one-way communication. The team accomplished this through a variety of methods, including regular mailings and a newsletter (*The Sumter Scribe*), increased use of the Forest's internet site (www.fs.fed.us/r8/fms), and conducting their working meetings in the open. The meetings were on a regular schedule, although the location changed to provide access to interested individuals across the State. The planning newsletter announced the meeting locations and dates. Public meetings were also held across the State during the scoping and alternative development phases of the Forest Plan development.

The Proposed Forest Plan, and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Plan were published and released for public review and comment on February 7, 2003.

Four public meetings were held in April 2003 to address any questions the public would have on the draft plan. The dates and locations were the following:

- April 8, Ramada Inn, Clemson
- April 10, Clemson Extension Meeting Facility, Union
- April 28, Savannah Lakes Resort and Marina, McCormick
- April 29, Forest Headquarters, Columbia

The Forest received more than 1,000 letters and e-mails by the July 3, 2003 deadline. Comments from these letters and e-mails were summarized into approximately 650 public concerns. Each comment within a letter that provided factual information, professional opinion, or informed judgment relating to the DEIS and Forest Plan was entered into a database. The letters and comments are part of the process records located in the Supervisor's Office. Responses to the public concerns can be found in Appendix L of the FEIS.

ALTERNATIVES

Seven alternatives were analyzed in detail in the DEIS. Seven are considered in detail in the FEIS, including Alternative I, the Selected Alternative. Two additional alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study for reasons given in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. All alternatives considered in detail meet minimum legal and environmental standards.

The management theme for each of the alternatives is provided below. Although every alternative address all 14 of the significant issues, the themes described here focus only on the emphasis areas for each alternative. More information regarding how each alternative responds to the issues, distinguishing characteristics and acreage allocated for the management and

prescription areas are provided in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. A detailed discussion of the environmental effects for the alternatives considered in detail are included in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Alternatives Considered, But Eliminated From Detailed Study

Alternative C

Alternative C would emphasize resource management with minimal human intervention to the natural resources. Active management would only occur 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 timber harvest, but not under a sustainable harvest schedule as is done on suitable forest land.

Alternative H was eliminated from detailed study because the land allocations for this alternative were identical to Alternative A; therefore, the environmental effects would be essentially the same. The only significant difference between Alternative A and Alternative H was that in Alternative A, 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 “unsuitable for timber production.” Since the main difference is primarily an administrative classification change, and there would be no differences in the overall outputs and environmental effects, it was decided that this alternative did not need to be considered further in detail in the FEIS.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Selected Alternative (Alternative I)

Alternative I recognizes and balances the wide diversity of interests and values in management. This alternative emphasizes watershed health, water quality, semi-primitive and remote recreation opportunities, threatened and endangered species recovery, sustainable forest

ecosystem management on lands suitable for timber production and habitat for wide-ranging species. This alternative provides 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. Diverse ecosystems are sustained that support viable plant, wildlife and fish populations including habitats for those species needing large contiguous forested landscapes. A variety of old growth communities to meet biological and social needs is provided. Forest health is a priority to ensure a forest that is resistant to large-scale, catastrophic plant mortality from insects or disease, especially from non-native organisms. Prescribed fire, wildland fire use, and timber harvesting are used to restore natural ecosystem processes, maintain fire dependant communities and reduce fuel-loading.

Alternative A

Alternative A emphasizes production of goods and services beneficial to local economies and communities. Timber management provides sustained yield of wood products with emphasis on high quality sawtimber and public-demand species including game and other species.

Alternative B

Alternative B is biologically driven, emphasizing 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. Prescribed fire, wildland fire use, and timber harvesting are used to restore natural ecosystem processes and maintain fire dependant communities. The long-term goal provides 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.

Alternative D

Alternative D strives to reach and maintain a balanced age class for tree growth. All suitable lands are available for sustained-yield management. Production of both commercial wood products and a variety of aquatic/wildlife habitats are also emphasized. Old growth is provided only on unsuitable land, on steep slopes, riparian areas, or similar areas.

Alternative E

A natural setting and concentrated facilities are provided that attract a variety of recreation users, with an emphasis on backcountry recreation. Most areas maintain a continuous forested canopy. Large blocks of the forest would be maintained in a roadless condition to provide remote, backcountry recreation. Active resource management is concentrated in certain locations and supports recreation use and visual quality.

Alternative F (No Action)

This alternative was developed for the 1985 Forest Plan (as amended) to address the “aging forest” condition. Management activities are designed to improve the age class distribution in all forest types and provide a balanced market and non-market resource program to maintain a broad geographic distribution of socio-economic benefits.

Alternative G

Alternative G emphasizes linking together movement corridors and large undisturbed areas, and concentrates on threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. National Forest System lands provide habitat for area sensitive species and a wide diversity of native plants and animals, particularly late-successional species. Old growth restoration areas around clusters of existing old growth and mature forests with old growth characteristics provide natural old growth dynamics. Road network mileage is reduced through closure and decommissioning of roads not needed for ecosystem stewardship or restoration.

FINDINGS RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND AUTHORITIES

I have considered the statutes governing management of the Sumter National Forest, 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 FEIS, Chapter 3, Physical Resources, Air Resources, all lands managed by the Forest are currently in attainment with National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Compliance with air quality statutes is directed in the Forest Plan, Chapter 2, Watersheds: Water, Soil, Air, and Aquatic Species; Chapter 2, Fire Management; and Chapter 2, Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Clean Water Act

The Revised Forest Plan contains direction to ensure all projects comply with their requirements of the Clean Water Act. This direction is found in the Forest Plan, Chapter 2, Riparian Area Management, Water Quality, Aquatic Habitats, Soil, and Air and Chapter 3, Management Prescription 11: Riparian Corridors. Analysis of sediment yields and cumulative effects for water quality and associated beneficial uses are discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Physical Resources, Water Resources.

National Historic Preservation Act

In accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Forest Plans are not undertakings under the National Historic Preservation Act. Consultation pursuant to Section 106 of the Act is not required at the Forest Plan level. As discussed in the Social/Economic Environment, Heritage Resource section of Chapter 3 of the FEIS, activities in the Forest Plan will be in compliance with the Act. Conformance with the Act is directed in the Forest Plan 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 (USFWS) 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 advance 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 (Roadless Rule) was published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 294). The Roadless 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 Roadless Rule FEIS. The Roadless Rule 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 Roadless Rule 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 Roadless Rule. On July 14, 2003, the United States District Court, Wyoming District (Judge Clarence Brimmer) found the Roadless 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 Forest Plan. 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.

In managing the roadless areas, the Sumter National Forest will follow the management direction

contained in this Forest Plan and any Forest Service policy on roadless area management specified in the Forest Service directives. However, should the Roadless Rule become effective, it will supercede this Revised Plan for those inventoried roadless areas identified in the Roadless Rule FEIS that was completed in November 2000. This would mean that those areas in the Revised Forest Plan that are identified as available for treatment, could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the Roadless Rule. According to 36 CFR 294.14(b), should the Roadless Rule become effective, an amendment to this Revised Forest Plan 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 include the Records of Decision for the Red Cockaded Woodpecker EIS, the Gypsy Moth EIS, the Southern Pine Beetle EIS.

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 Forest Plan 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 Forest Plan, 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 Forest Plan. Exercising my discretion under NFMA, I have determined that it is not “necessary” to apply the Forest Plan’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 Forest Plan, 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 Forest Plan. 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 Forest Plan. 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 Forest Plan.

The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Forest Plan. 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 Forest Plan.

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 Forest Plan 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 Forest Plan may not change unless the Forest Plan is amended.

The Forest Plan will be amended or revised to adjust to changing circumstances. For example, the management goals, objectives, and standards stated for the Sumter National Forest in the Forest Plan 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 Forest Plan.

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 notices. 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 Forest Plan 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 Sumter National Forest Plan, contact:

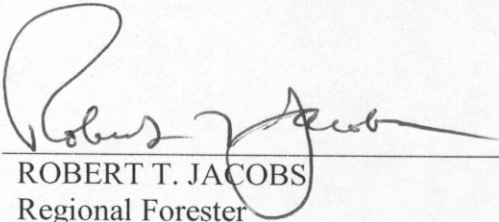
Jerome Thomas
Forest Supervisor
Sumter National Forest
4931 Broad River Road
Columbia, SC 29210
803-561-4000

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

APPROVAL

I am pleased to announce my decision and bring this phase of forest planning to completion. This Forest Plan 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 Forest Plan. 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 Sumter Land and Resource Management Plan.



ROBERT T. JACOBS
Regional Forester
Southern Region

1/15/04

Date