



File Code: 1950

Date: August 17, 2012

Dear Forest User,

The Nantahala Range District on the Nantahala National Forest is seeking comments on a proposal to add eight units in Macon, Jackson and Swain Counties to the prescribed burn rotation, beginning in the year 2013. These units would total 4,927 acres of National Forest and private land. Treatments would be predominantly conducted during the dormant season of the year, generally between October 15 and April 15. Maps showing the burn units are available by clicking the "Land and Resources Management" and "Projects" links on the forest's web page: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/nfsnc>.

In most cases Forest Service roads, water bodies, and topographical features would be used to contain the fire. In the absence of those features, fire lines would be established with machinery or hand tools. Qualified personnel from the Nantahala and surrounding Ranger Districts would conduct the prescribed burns, operating with approved burn plans. District personnel would patrol control lines during and after ignition to insure proper containment of the fire. More specific descriptions of the proposed units are given below:

1. **Coweeta Fields Units:** *12 Acres*, no ground disturbance, only pre-existing control lines would be used. Located within the Coweeta Hydrologic Station in Macon County.
2. **Finger Lake Unit:** *4 Acres*, no ground disturbance, only pre-existing control lines would be used. Located between Fontana Lake and Highway 28 in Swain County.
3. **Blackrock Unit:** *485 Acres*, no ground disturbance, only pre-existing control lines would be used. Located on the west side of Panthertown Valley in Jackson County. This burn would be designed to restore table mountain pine in the forest.
4. **Little Green Unit:** *329 Acres*, no ground disturbance, only pre-existing control lines would be used. Located on the East side of Panthertown Valley in Jackson County. This burn would be designed to restore table mountain pine in the forest.
5. **Bull Pen Unit:** *722 Acres*, control lines would consist of 20 feet of hand dug fire line and, all other control lines would be pre-existing. Located on the east side of the Chatooga River north of Bull Pen Rd and east of Whiteside Cove Rd in Macon County.
6. **Fire Gap Unit:** *1836 Acres*, control lines would consist of 1,715 feet of hand dug fire line, and all other control lines would be pre-existing. This unit is a combination of two previous fire units, Jarret Knob and Chestnut Knob. Combining these two units will allow the inclusion of an additional 580 acres. Located north of Rainbow Springs Rd. and south of SR 1310 in Macon County.
7. **Split Whiteoak Unit:** *844 Acres*, control lines would consist of 2,920 feet of mechanically dug fire line, 304 feet of hand dug fire line, and all other control lines would be pre-existing. Located at the north end of Forest Service road 711 in Macon County.
8. **Buzzard Knob Unit:** *695 Acres*, control lines would consist of 20,854 feet of mechanically dug fire line. 20,254 feet of that would be re-grading old road beds, and there would be 600 feet of new construction. While about half of this unit would be located on private land, the majority of the ground disturbance would be on National Forest land. Located along the Rainbow Springs Rd. in the Bryson Branch area in Macon County.

The purpose and need for the proposed treatments include reducing fuel accumulation in order to better protect national forest and adjacent ownerships from wildfire; improving wildlife habitat by increasing the availability and quality of nutritious forage for grazing and browsing animals such as deer, turkey, and bear; reducing undesirable shade tolerant species such as mountain laurel, red maple, and white pine in pine beetle



areas to allow for regeneration of desirable species; and establishing burn units in a mosaic pattern to mimic natural fire behavior. Objectives for the treatments include:

1. Reduce 1 hour fuels by 70% and 10 hour fuels by 50%
2. Consume no more than 50% of organic soil layer
3. Create and maintain snags within burn unit for Indiana bat habitat
4. For pine-oak/heath forest types, reduce forest canopy and mid-story layers by 20-25% while increasing the diversity of grasses and herbs to 60-80% of the forest floor
5. For oak-hickory forest types, reduce mid-story white pine component where present and eliminate white pine regeneration; reduce shrub layer by 50% in driest types and increase grass-herb component to provide 50-70% coverage on the forest floor.

The proposed treatment units and the proposed dozer fire lines have been assessed by the forest's interdisciplinary team and no cultural or biological resources will be negatively affected by the proposed actions.

I encourage your participation during this 30-day notice and comment period. Following the comment period, I will be publishing a decision for the project. Please make your comments as specific as possible, and you must provide the following information: (1) your name and address; (2) title of the proposed action; (3) specific substantive comments (215.2) on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that I should consider in reaching a decision; and (4) your signature or other means of identification verification. For organizations, a signature or other means of identification verification must be provided for the individual authorized to represent your organization.

In accordance with 36 CFR 215.6(2)(4), comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days beginning the day after publication of this notice in *The Franklin Press*. Oral or hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Comments may be sent electronically, in a common digital format, to: comments-southern-north-carolina-nantahala-nantahala@fs.fed.us. Comments may also be sent by regular mail to: Nantahala Ranger District, 90 Sloan Road, Franklin NC 28734 or faxed to 828-369-6592.

Please contact project leader Greg Brooks at 828-524-6441 x418 or at gbrooks01@fs.fed.us if you have questions concerning this proposal. Thank you for your continued interest in the management of the National Forests in North Carolina.

Sincerely,
/s/ Michael Wilikins

Michael Wilikins
District Ranger

