



File Code: 1950-1

Date: February 26, 2010

Dear Interested Members of the Public:

Enclosed with this letter is a list of proposed actions in an area of the Pisgah National Forest in Haywood County known as the Harmon Den Project (see Figure 1, Vicinity Map). These actions have been developed to address management opportunities identified for timber, wildlife, vegetation, fuels, recreation, and aquatic resources. The Harmon Den Project area is located about 14 miles southwest of Hot Springs, North Carolina and about 25 miles northwest of Asheville, North Carolina. The proposal is within the Harmon Den Analysis Area, which comprises 9,500 acres in Compartments 451, 459, 460, 461, 470, 471, 472, 473, and 474. The purpose of this letter is to inform interested and affected parties and to solicit comments on the proposal.

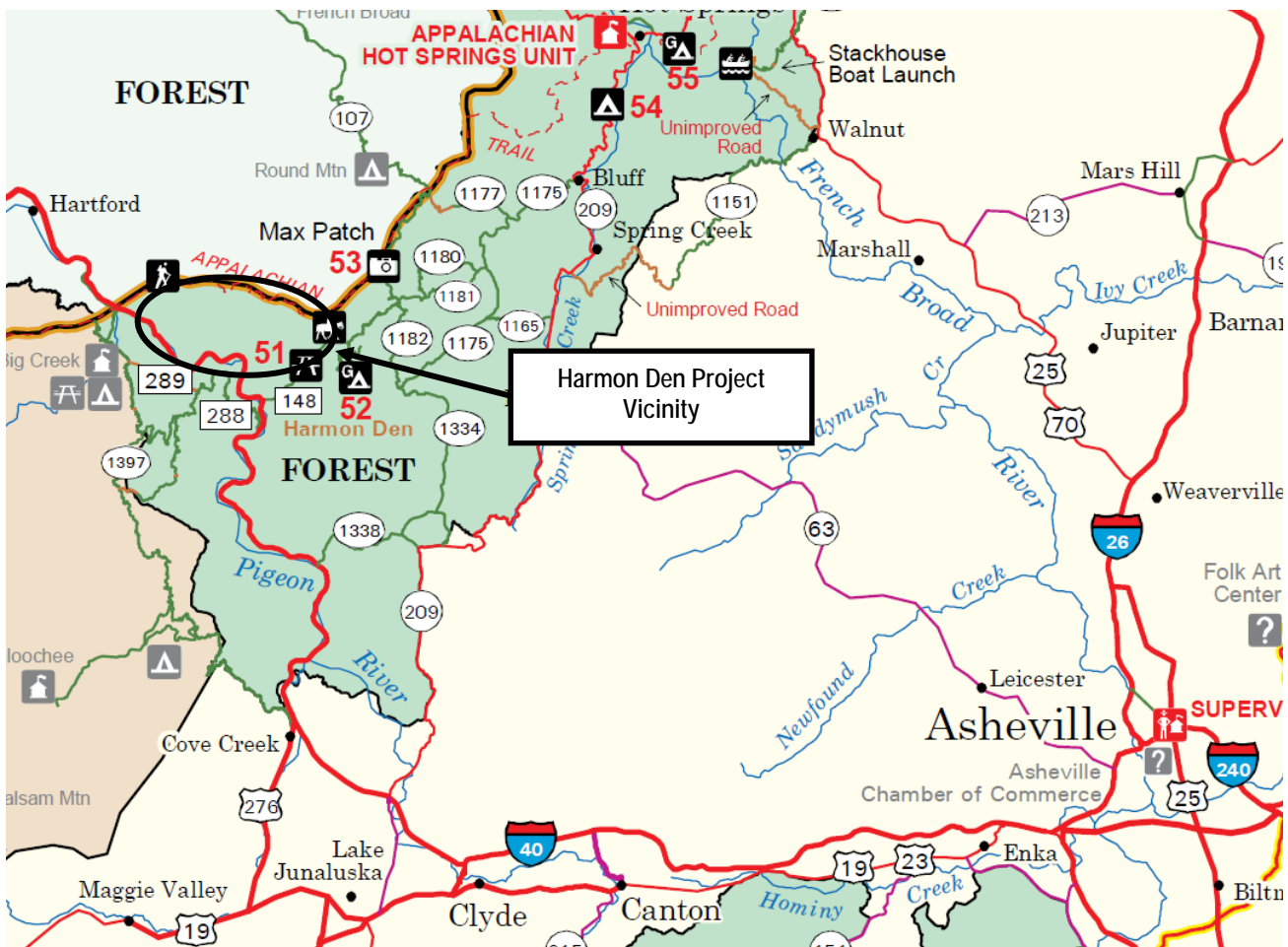


Figure 1: Harmon Den Project General Vicinity



Harmon Den Proposed Action

The Proposed Action was developed to meet the Purpose and Need (Section 1.3 below). The following table summarizes harvest-related information for the Proposed Action:

Table 1: Harmon Den Project Proposed Action Harvesting

Stand Number	Ac	Avg. Stand Age (CISC) ¹	Treatment (average reserve ft ² of basal area/acre)	Harvest System ²
451-7a	21	101	Two-age (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Cable
451-7b	11	101	Two-age (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Cable
451-12	39	101	Two-age (15-20 ft ²)	Cable
451-22	12	80	Two-age (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Ground based
459-10	10	79	Two-age (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Ground based
459-12	24	83	Two-age (15-20 ft ²)	Cable
460-6	15	82	Two-age (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Ground based
460-10	9	82	Two-age (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Ground based
461-2	31	81	Two-age (15-20 ft ²)	Ground based
Total Two-age	172³			
451-19	33	17	Overwood Removal (15-20 ft ² – 25-30 ft ² in places)	Ground based
Total Overwood	33³			

1 Continuous Inventory of Stand Conditions

2 Ground based includes tractor and/or rubber tired skidder

3 Harvesting would include developing about 8½ acres total of log landings and skid roads within harvest units (about 1 acre of log landings and skid roads for each 25 acres harvested). Existing log landings and skid roads would be used where available. Skid roads and log landings would be constructed using North Carolina Forest Practices Guidelines (FPGs) and Forest Plan standards (best management practices or BMPs). Following harvest activities, unsurfaced skid roads and log landings would be disked and seeded with an appropriate seed mix to reduce potential for sedimentation and compaction. Skid trails would be used where appropriate, but are different than skid roads because they do not have a blade used to cut into the soil – see definitions at end of Appendix A.

In addition to commercial harvesting, the following activities are proposed:

- Site preparation for natural regeneration with herbicide and hand tools on an estimated 172 acres of regeneration harvest using Triclopyr ester and amine formulations with the cut stump and streamline application methods to ensure establishment of a satisfactory stand within five years after final harvest. All regenerated stands would be monitored for desired stocking density and species variety with a stocking survey conducted 3-5 growing seasons following site preparation. Small enrichment plantings with blight resistant American chestnuts or oaks may occur within hardwood regeneration areas on suitable sites if seedlings become available. Grape arbors, if present ranging in size from 0.1 – 0.5 acres per 10 acres would be retained during the site preparation.
- Release natural regenerated hardwoods on an estimated 205 acres regenerated using a 20% Triclopyr ester formulation by streamline application method 1-3 years following site preparation to control stump sprouts and non-native invasive plants.
- Develop a dispersed recreation site along FSRs 148 and 148H just east of the Harmon Den day-use parking area.
- Designate about 608 total acres of old growth communities in Compartments 459, 460, 461, 472, and 473 within Management Areas 3B (timber management), 4C (visually pleasing scenery), and 14 (Appalachian Trail Corridor) instead of the 51 acres proposed under Alternative B.

- Designate at least 51 acres of small patch old growth communities in Compartment 460.
- Prescribe burn about 500 acres between Cherry Creek, The Max Patch Road (SR 1182), and the Cold Springs Road in the eastern portion of the analysis area.
- Prescribe burn a 50 acre stand in Compartment 470 off the Skiffley Creek Road previously harvested in the Preacher Timber Sale. The stand was burned in 2005.
- Perform Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) on approximately 694 acres of natural hardwood regeneration to ensure desired stocking density, species variety, and to control non-native invasive species in 23 stands with hand tools and herbicide using Triclopyr amine and ester formulations applied with the cut surface and streamline applications to release crop trees—non-native invasive species would be treated too.
- Use and maintain existing classified (system) roads through reconditioning and reconstruction which would include replacing undersized or damaged culverts, widening curves and improving drainage structures.
- Replace a damaged culvert on the Cold Springs Road (FSR 148) and Cherry Creek.
- Streams in the analysis area would be assessed during field review for potential brook trout reintroduction.
- Move the gate currently behind a wildlife field off the Cold Springs Road in Compartment 459 up to the Cold Springs Road.
- Add six existing non-system roads (about 3 miles) to the Forest's transportation system as D1 roads; add one existing non-system road (about 1/5 mile) to the Forest's transportation system as a D3 road; and add one existing non-system road (about 1/4 mile) to the Forest's transportation system as a D5 road (see Roads Analysis, Appendix G).
- Develop about 0.3 miles of temporary roads for harvest-related activities—following harvest-related activities it would be disked, seeded, and closed.
- Decommission two existing unclassified (non-system) roads in Compartments 460 and 461 for about 1/3 mile total.
- Allow the access on Interstate 40 (FSR 3522 in Compartment 461, about 1/4 mile) to the Rube Rock Trail (TR 314) and the Groundhog Creek Trail (TR 315), which is currently blocked, to revert to a natural state, and remove it from the transportation system.
- Decommission the Rube Rock Trail (TR 314) and the Groundhog Creek Trail (TR 315) between Interstate 40 and Skiffley Creek Road (FSR 357). The portions of the two trails between the Skiffley Creek Road and the Appalachian Trail would not be decommissioned.
- Close, decommission, and relocate dispersed campsite(s) between Cold Springs Creek and the Cold Springs Road to less sensitive area(s), where available. Close existing dispersed site in wildlife field near FSR 148 day-use parking area.
- Relocate the Cherry Creek Trail (TR 300) out of the riparian area to reduce potential for impacts to aquatic resources.
- Control/manage non-native invasive plant species (including garlic mustard) along roads with herbicides (Glyphosate and/or Triclopyr) and manual treatment (about 5 acres total).

Purpose and Need for the Proposal

There is a need to develop early successional habitat (ESH) for wildlife in the analysis area. Forest Plan standards are to provide at least 5% not to exceed 10% ESH in Management Area

(MA) 2A; at least 5% not to exceed 15% ESH in MA 3B; and not to exceed 10% in MA 4D (Forest Plan, page III-31). Currently there is 0% ESH in MA 2A, 0% ESH in MA 3B, and 0% ESH in MA 4D. The purpose of the approximately 205 acres of regeneration harvesting is to develop additional ESH in the project area and increase the amount of hard mast producing tree species (oaks and hickories). Related to harvesting for wildlife habitat development, there is also a need to schedule harvesting on regular intervals in each of these MAs to provide for a sustainable supply of timber products (Forest Plan, pages III-68, III-75, and III-85). The last timber harvest project in the project area was more than 17 years ago. The harvest of approximately 205 acres would produce timber products for local and regional economies.

There is a need to effectively and efficiently control/manage competing vegetation in stands regenerated with this proposal because competing vegetation reduces vigor and amount of desired tree species. The purpose of using hand tools and herbicides is to reduce competing vegetation and perform timber stand improvement within regenerated stands and improve vigor and growth of desired tree species, especially the oak and hickory hard mast species.

There is a need to efficiently and effectively control/manage populations of non-native invasive plants. Currently there are non-native invasive plant species present in the analysis area, including garlic mustard. The purpose of the herbicide and manual treatment of non-native invasive plants is to reduce potential for spread of these species in the analysis area.

There is a need to improve water quality and aquatic habitat in the analysis area. Currently there are impacts to streams in the analysis area caused by recreation and roads. The purpose of: decommissioning a non-system road; closing some dispersed campsites; replacing a culvert; reintroducing brook trout; moving a gate; placing some non-system roads onto the transportation system; and seasonally closing a trail to equestrian use is to improve water quality, stream bank stability, habitat, and species diversity.

There is a need to designate additional old growth communities in Compartments 461, 472, and 473, as well as to designate small patch old growth communities in Compartment 460 because no small patch old growth communities are currently designated in this compartment. Currently there are 335 acres of large patch old growth community habitat (patch 17) and 133 acres of small patch old growth community habitat designated in the four compartments proposed for harvesting. The purpose of designating additional small and large patch communities prior to harvesting is to ensure there is a network of old growth communities across the Forest.

There is a need to reduce fuels and improve wildlife habitat diversity in the analysis area. Currently, excess fuel loads pose a threat to resources and wildlife habitat conditions are not being optimized in the analysis area. The purpose of prescribe burning up to about 550 acres in Compartments 451 and 470 is to reduce fuel loads and potential for future wildfires to burn with adverse impacts, while improving wildlife habitat diversity.

There is a need to ensure appropriate maintenance of approved trails occurs and users are able to safely access them, and the impacts from the trails do not adversely affect aquatic resources. Currently, the historically available access to Trails 314 and 315 from Interstate 40 has been blocked by the State of North Carolina because of safety concerns. The purpose of allowing this access to revert to a natural state and removing it from the transportation system is to permanently remove this unsafe access point on Interstate 40. Currently, the Cherry Creek Trail (Trail 300) is located very close to Cherry Creek, and erosion and sedimentation have been

identified as a result. The purpose of relocating the Cherry Creek Trail away from Cherry Creek is to improve long term aquatic resources.

There is a need to develop a dispersed recreation site along FSRs 148 and 148H in order to reduce traffic to the Cold Springs Creek campsites. Excessive use at the Cold Springs Creek sites is causing damage to riparian resources, primarily erosion of stream banks. The purpose of developing a dispersed recreation site at this location is to allow revegetation at the Cold Springs Creek site while maintaining recreational access in the area.

Forest Plan Direction

The Harmon Den proposal was developed to address management opportunities identified for timber, wildlife, aquatic, and other forest resources within the analysis area. Management opportunities were identified through a comparison of existing conditions with desired current and future conditions defined by the General Direction and Standards for Management Areas (MA) 2A, 3B, 4D, and 18 in the Land and Resource Management Plan, Amendment 5, for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests (Forest Plan, USDA March 1994). The general direction and goals for MA 2A is to provide visually pleasing scenery, roads are generally open with adjacent forest land managed to provide a quality visual experience, and timber production is permitted (Forest Plan, page III-63). The general direction and goals for MA 3B is to emphasize a sustainable supply of timber with few open roads while permitting road construction for resource management and to manage habitat of mixed ages of forests primarily for wildlife species such as wild turkey, deer and other animals requiring similar environments (Forest Plan, pages III-63 and III-71). The general direction and goals for MA 4D is to emphasize high quality habitats for wildlife requiring older forests and freedom from disturbance from motorized vehicles. Small widely dispersed openings throughout the management area are allowed and most roads are closed to private motorized vehicles. In addition, early successional habitat is provided in conjunction with managing suitable timber land in these areas (Forest Plan, page III-78). Embedded within MAs 2A, 3B, and 4D is MA 18; which consists of the aquatic ecosystem, riparian ecosystem, and closely associated plant and animal communities and is actively managed to protect and enhance, where possible, the distinctive resource values and characteristics dependent on or associated with these systems (Forest Plan, page III-179). Two other MAs are designated within the Harmon Den analysis area: MA 5 (backcountry recreation) and MA 14 (Appalachian Trail). No ground disturbing activities are proposed in either MA.

There are portions of two proposed North Carolina Natural Heritage Areas (NHA) in the Harmon Den analysis area: Pigeon River Gorge Macro Site and Snowbird Creek/Cedar Cliff. Harvesting is proposed in the eastern portion of the Pigeon River Gorge Macro Site, but not in Snowbird Creek/Cedar Cliff. There are no Forest Plan Special Interest Areas, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Congressionally Designated Wilderness, or Wild and Scenic river designations in the analysis area.

A roads (transportation) analysis will be prepared that analyzes the current and needed transportation system in the analysis area. The analysis will be completed pursuant to Forest Service Handbook 7709.55-2009-2.

I recognize you may have interest and concerns with this proposal and this is why I am requesting your comments to the proposal to help me identify key issues and possible alternative

ways of meeting the project's purpose and need. I have decided to initiate an official 30-day Notice and Comment period with this scoping proposal pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 215.3 and CFR 215.6. Comments on the proposal shall be accepted for 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice [36 CFR 215.6(a)(1)(i)] and individuals must comment during a Notice and Comment period to be eligible to appeal a decision made on a project (36 CFR 215.13). Comments may be mailed to: Appalachian Ranger District, PO Box 128, Burnsville, North Carolina, 28714; faxed to (828) 682-9179; or e-mailed in a common digital format to: comments-southern-north-carolina-pisgah-appalachian@fs.fed.us.

If you have any questions regarding this proposal, please contact Ted Oprean, Project Leader (828) 877-3265, or Joshua Martin, Team Leader (828) 682-6146. Thank you for your continued interest in the management of your National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ *Tina Tilley*

TINA R. TILLEY
District Ranger

Enclosure

Harmon Den Proposal



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|-------------------|---|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Analysis Area | TSI | Existing FS Roads | Dispersed Campsite |
| Compartments | Proposed Rx Burns | Roads Being Added to System | |
| Two Age Harvest | Designated Old Growth | Roads Being Decommissioned | |
| Overstory Removal | Proposed Addition to Old Growth Large Patch | | |

Prepared by: AWW - 9/2008

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