



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

National Forests in North Carolina
Croatan National Forest
Croatan Ranger District

141 East Fisher Avenue
New Bern, NC 28560-8468
252-638-5628

File Code: 1950

Date: November 3, 2004

Dear Friend of the Croatan National Forest:

The Croatan National Forest proposes to improve wildlife habitat by using the authorities of a “new” tool, known as Stewardship Contracting. The authorities of stewardship contracting allow us to use money generated from a timber thinning in order to accomplish other wildlife habitat improvement projects on the district.

Proposed Action Being Considered

This project is known as the Brice’s Creek Watershed Wildlife Habitat Improvement Stewardship Project and consists of the following activities: thinning approximately 70 acres; chainsaw felling of the hardwood and loblolly pine midstory on approximately 300 acres or more, depending on funding; installing 4 drilled Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) artificial cavities in an area currently unoccupied by RCW (installing a recruitment cluster); permanently restricting vehicular access (install gates) on Forest Service Road (FSR) 175 and FSR 202; planting native warm season grasses within the roadbed of FSR 175 and 202; and cleaning-up trash along FSR 121-1, FSR 175, FSR 202.

The objectives of this project include: to restore the presettlement condition of the 70 acre thinning unit by reducing the number of canopy trees per acre, while retaining the appropriate canopy tree species and canopy tree structure native to this area (the Croatan Ecological Classification System will be used to determine the appropriate presettlement condition); to reduce hardwood midstory competition in active RCW (Federally Endangered Species) territories, as well as areas potentially suitable for RCW; to expand the RCW population on the forest; to minimize forest trash dumping and other illegal activities on FSR 175 and FSR 202; to improve wildlife habitat within the road bed of FSR 175 and FSR 202; and to improve forest user satisfaction and enjoyment.

The following mitigation measures are being considered for this project: chainsaw felling of hardwood and loblolly pine midstory is proposed only on pine savanna landtypes (Croatan Land and Resource Management Plan, Forest Plan Appendix A 2002, and only as needed; midstory trees will be left where they fall; and Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem and Switch Grass are preferred for planting on FSR 175 and 202.

Maps of the project area are available on the internet, www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc (under the Forest Planning tab), or can be obtained by contacting the Croatan Ranger Station (see below for address).



Purpose and Need

Historically, when frequent fires maintained the landscape, the area proposed for thinning would have supported a mixed pine savanna that included longleaf pine, loblolly pine and pond pine overstory, little midstory and a well developed herbaceous understory. However, due to fire suppression and other past management practices, the thinning area is a dense forest primarily dominated with loblolly pine overstory, a well developed hardwood midstory and a sparse herbaceous understory. Thinning in this area is needed in order to restore historical savanna structure, improve RCW and other wildlife habitat and to increase the amount of sunlight penetrating the forest floor, thus further developing the herbaceous understory. In addition, hardwood and loblolly pine midstory removal is also needed in other areas within the Brice's Creek watershed in order to restore presettlement savanna structure and composition and to improve wildlife habitat.

The RCW is currently listed as a federally endangered species and is known to occur within the project area. The Croatan National Forest's goal is to recover a viable population of this species and recruitment clusters are needed to provide additional suitable nesting habitat which, in turn, will promote the gradual expansion of this species.

Currently, FSR 175 and FSR 202 are short, dead-end roads which concentrate trash dumping and other illegal activities. These roads are proposed for permanent gating, cleaning and planting in order to eliminate illegal activity, prevent further resource damage and to improve forest user satisfaction and enjoyment. FSR 121-1 also seems to concentrate trash dumping and other illegal activities; however, this is a through road and is not considered for closing at this time, but all trash will be removed.

Public Involvement

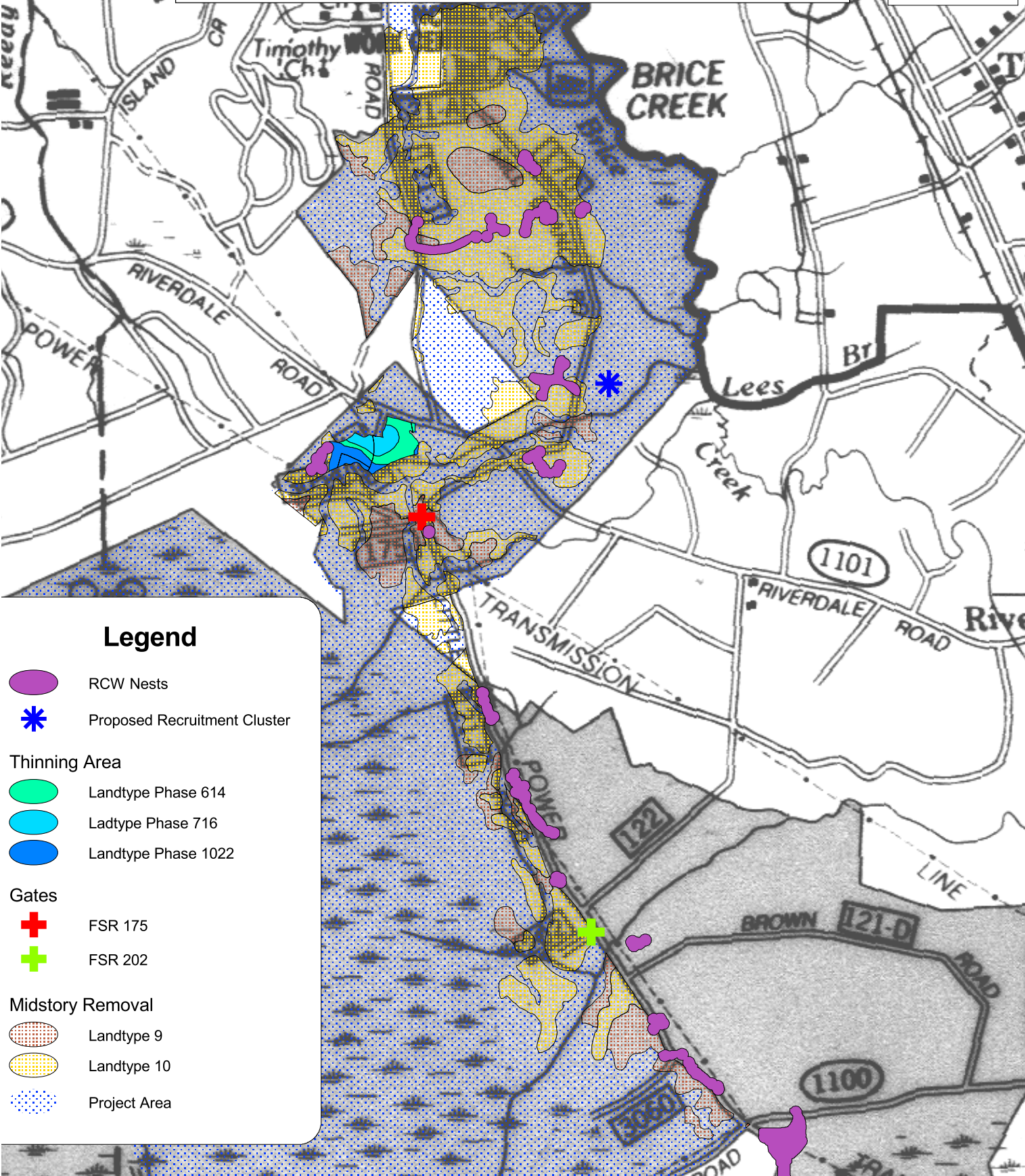
A decision has not been made to implement any of these proposals. We are in the process of considering public comments and evaluating environmental effects. To help us accomplish this, please consider this proposal and let us have your comments and suggestions by December 3, 2005. You will be notified of any resulting decision.

Your comments can be mailed to the following address: Croatan National Forest, 141 E. Fisher Ave., New Bern, NC, 28560 or emailed to comments-southern-north-carolina@fs.fed.us. If you have any questions regarding this proposal, please contact Mike Brod at (252) 638-5628.

Thank you for your time and interest in the management activities on the Croatan National Forest.

Sincerely,
/s/ Dennis Foster (for)
LAUREN L. HILLMAN
District Ranger

Brice's Creek Watershed Wildlife-Habitat Improvement Project



Legend

- RCW Nests
- Proposed Recruitment Cluster
- Thinning Area**
 - Landtype Phase 614
 - Landtype Phase 716
 - Landtype Phase 1022
- Gates**
 - FSR 175
 - FSR 202
- Midstory Removal**
 - Landtype 9
 - Landtype 10
 - Project Area

