



NATIONAL DEER ASSOCIATION

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Linwood Butler
District Ranger
Shoal Creek Ranger District
45 Hwy 281
Heflin, AL 36264

7 June, 2022

RE: Comments Regarding the Big Oak Analysis Area Project Proposed Action

Dear Mr. Butler:

On behalf of the National Deer Association (NDA), I am writing to state our support for the proposed project focused on restoring and maintaining the native longleaf and shortleaf pine ecosystem, providing habitat for native flora and fauna, increasing fire resiliency and increasing outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences on 6500 acres in the Shoal Creek portion of the Talladega National Forest. We are a national non-profit conservation organization with the mission to ensure the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. We represent 30,000 members nationwide, and our membership includes hunters, landowners and natural resource professionals.

The Big Oak Analysis Area project is designed to improve forest health and diversity and increase and enhance recreation opportunities through a number of techniques, including varied silviculture and herbicide treatments and construction activities. These techniques will encourage growth of species best adapted to local growing conditions in the area. The NDA supports the use of these techniques. Specifically, we support the use of these techniques to improve forest health by decreasing fire susceptibility and increasing resilience and resistance to insects and disease. The proposed action will improve quality habitat for rare and declining species, as well as desired game and non-game species, reduce susceptibility across the landscape to fire and disease, and construction activities will provide better recreation and access opportunities, including hunting and shooting.

The NDA is dedicated to ensuring the future of wild deer, wildlife habitat and hunting. The Big Oak project advances the future of all three by enhancing and providing quality habitat for game and non-game species, increasing forest resiliency and creating and improving access. Through our extensive work on deer and habitat management across North America, we know that the actions proposed by the Shoal Creek Ranger District will benefit wild deer by enhancing the varying habitat requirements, critical habitat components and ecosystem preferences of the region's fauna. The region's white-tailed deer require varying habitat types and structures, and the proposal's inclusion of wildlife habitat enhancement measures such as timber management will provide deer with much-needed cover and forage, resulting in more and better hunting opportunities for deer hunters.

We applaud the Shoal Creek Ranger District's diligent and thoughtful work in drafting a proposal that greatly improves wildlife habitat in the Talladega National Forest. Further, we support the Forest Service's inclusion of hunters and other stakeholders in the forest management process.

Sincerely,

Torin Miller
Director of Policy