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### **Purpose:**

The Forest Management Unit (FMU) of the Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) works with other WRD staff to enhance forest health, wildlife habitat, native species diversity, rare species management and protect watersheds on State-owned lands while generating critical revenue for the Division through the implementation of proven silvicultural practices. Silvicultural practices include provisions for the establishment and regeneration of forest stands, managing for healthy trees of desirable species and to harvest timber for wildlife habitat improvement.

The use of Forest Management Proposals (FMP) was initiated in 2006. This process was implemented to facilitate communication among staff involved with silvicultural activities, ensure forest management activities are reviewed and provide tracking of timber management activities on state-owned, WRD-managed lands regardless of funding sources. The acquisition of multiple tracts over the past twelve years, coupled with staff turnover, warrants an updated process. Advancements in WRD GIS capabilities and new policies such as the Habitat Management Planning for State-Owned Lands (WRD-L-001) will benefit the FMP process.

The purpose of this policy is to clarify the process, roles, development and implementation of FMPs and other silvicultural activities.

### **Policy:**

#### **A. Activities requiring a Forest Management Proposal**

- 1) Commercial timber harvest: any timber removal producing merchantable material at least equal to the value of the direct costs of harvesting;
- 2) Pre-commercial thinning: the removal of trees not for immediate financial return but to reduce stocking to improve the health, growth and minimize forest pest infestations on remaining trees. This method may also be used to release desirable native groundcover;
- 3) Site preparation: Site preparation techniques may include mechanical, chemical, burning or any combination. Sites are manipulated to reduce competition, remove logging debris, improve soil drainage/tilth, and improve growing conditions for tree seedlings and

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desirable groundcover. Typical mechanical site prep methods may include shearing, raking, piling, harrowing, mowing, scalping, subsoiling, bedding, savannah plowing, ditching, mounding, etc. Chemical site prep may be applied by hand crew, ground equipment or by aerial means. Herbicides may be selective or non-selective depending on the target species to be controlled or specific habitat management goals. If a site prep burn is to be utilized, a prescribed fire plan must be written and approved per policy (WRD-F-001);

- 4) Reforestation: the reestablishment of forest cover either naturally (by natural seeding), coppice (or root suckers) or artificially (by direct seeding or planting of seedlings). Note: reforestation typically maintains the same forest type and customarily is done after the previous stand was removed. This also includes single tree or forest gap regeneration/reforestation;
- 5) Afforestation: the establishment of a forest or stand of trees in an area where there was no tree cover (e.g., old field, pasture, wildlife opening, borrow pit, mine spoil area, etc.);
- 6) Timber Stand Improvement (TSI): Improving the quality of a forest stand by removing or deadening undesirable species to achieve desired stocking, species composition or desirable groundcover. TSI practices include applying herbicides, girdling, mowing, mulching, or cutting any forested area. Areas greater than 5 acres containing trees over 2" diameter at breast height (DBH) require a GEPA (Georgia Environmental Protection Act). Prescribed burning is covered in the Prescribed Fire Policy (WRD-F-001);
- 7) Ecological Restoration: the process of facilitating the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed. This includes the restoration of woody and herbaceous species or a combination of both. Ecological restoration may involve the silvicultural process and techniques mentioned in the above activities;
- 8) New timber harvest road construction: Roads that are constructed for the removal of timber products. These roads must be gated and retired with foot only travel by the public. These roads may be used only for administrative and silvicultural operations access. DNR Engineering and Construction must approve all new program road construction for public use.

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**The following activities are exempted if in compliance with the GEPA.**

- Precommercial thinning within 100 feet of the shoulder of a WMA road and the right of way from all other roads or maintained wildlife openings
- Planting of shrubs or other woody material for habitat improvement in an area that is 5 acres or less in wildlife openings.
- Applying herbicide within 50 feet of the road shoulder of a WMA road and the right of way from all other roads.
- Mulching or removing trees within 50 feet of the road shoulder of a WMA road and the edge of the right away from all other roads, if the aggregate acres treated does not exceed 5 acres
- Activities on areas that are being managed as fields or for agricultural purposes.
- Applying herbicide for the treatment of invasive herbaceous and woody species. Areas treated must not exceed 5 acres in aggregate.

**B. Proposal Submission**

WRD staff responsible for land management decisions (Biologists, FMU staff, Technicians) may propose a forest management activity for sites under their assigned responsibility. WRD staff most familiar with specific areas need a process through which they can provide input into habitat improvement projects using sound silvicultural activities. This procedure provides a systematic method for awareness, input, and review by WRD staff with site responsibilities. FMPs must be approved before any grant applications or experimental trials are conducted. An abbreviated timeline is provided in Exhibit A.

- 1) Proposals will be made in concert with appropriate WRD staff including not less than one representative each from Game Management (GM), Wildlife Conservation (WC), FMU, and Fisheries Management (FM; when applicable) and will conform to the stated management objectives (Strategic Plan and associated work plans) of the property. The proposal should list as authors all staff involved with the proposal.
- 2) Proposals to be implemented during the following fiscal year (FY), must be electronically submitted to the FMU office by March 1 preceding the FY of implementation. The FMU Program Manager will provide the appropriate template (Exhibit B) each year and will

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send reminders to develop forest management plans to Region Supervisors and WC Section Program Managers each January. At this stage of the process, enough information should be given so other DNR staff can visit the project site to evaluate the activities proposed. Exhibit C is an example of a complete FMP.

- 3) Newly acquired properties may have proposals submitted after the March 1 deadline to implement timely forest management activities, but must comply with all components of the process.
- 4) FMP are organized by Region at the FMU office and delivered electronically to respective GM Regional Supervisors, the Wildlife Conservation Section (WCS) environmental review coordinator, the FMU Program Manager, and the Historic Preservation Division (HPD) on or before March 15 for review.
- 5) DNR staff tasked to review FMPs should conduct site visits and discuss details of projects with project initiators as needed. Site visits and discussions with the project initiators should occur prior the annual FMP spring meeting held in each region.
- 6) Proposals are discussed at annual spring planning meetings, held in each Region, with Regional Supervisors and staff from involved sections. The spring planning meetings should take place in April and is the time for final comments and concerns to be discussed and resolved through a consensus process.
- 7) The project initiator has lead responsibility for preparing the final project proposal with input from other staff being considered and incorporated as agreed at the annual spring meeting. Final project proposals are submitted to the FMU Program Manager by May 20.
- 8) The FMU summarizes projects by region and sends the summaries to the respective Regional Supervisor by May 30. The Regional Supervisors review and indicate their approval, disapproval, modification or termination to the FMU Program Manager by June 15.
- 9) Disapproved, terminated or modified proposals must include an explanation/justification. If a proposal, or part thereof, cannot be agreed upon by the reviewers the proposal will

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be submitted by the Region Supervisor to FMU Program Manager for Headquarters input. All comments of differing opinions should be submitted with the proposal for this level of review. Headquarters will review and make the final decision and return to the FMU Program Manager for return to the Regional Supervisor for signature, if needed.

- 10) Signed proposals are then taken to the WCS Program Manager and FMU Manager for signature.
- 11) Signed proposals are forwarded by the FMU Program Manager to the appropriate Section Chief for final approval by July 1.
- 12) Approved projects are provided to the GM, WCS, and FM (if needed) Chiefs to be prioritized and returned to FMU by July 15.
- 13) Projects will be completed as soon as feasible following prioritization based on resource availability, revenue generation, ecological need/urgency, project time constraints, (e.g., grant deadlines, etc.) and available funding. Projects will not be terminated prior to completion without a written explanation approved by the appropriate Regional Supervisor, the FMU Program Manager and signed by the appropriate Section Chief.
- 14) If it becomes necessary to significantly modify a project after approval, a project proposal addendum must be prepared. Addendums must follow the same guidelines as the initial project proposal including revised maps as needed. A significant modification is any amendment that modifies the original intent of the proposal. Examples could include, but are not limited to: altering a harvest from a thin to a final harvest, adding or removing a stand(s), new forest road construction, or altering an herbicide prescription. This does not include necessary minor adjustments to stand boundaries due to SMZ's, the removal of sensitive areas (e.g., gopher tortoise burrows, outcrops, grave sites) from the harvest area, or other minor modifications. Addendums must be approved by the Regional Supervisor, WCS Program Manager, FMU Program Manager, and the appropriate Section Chief. If a timber harvest contract or any other management contract has been executed on an approved proposal, addendums may not be feasible.

Proposals must be submitted using the correct Word template, in electronic format, to the FMU office in Social Circle by March 1. The proposal must include the following ArcView generated

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maps: a) Project location map – An overview of the project area with a current color aerial view, with visible property and project boundaries with enough detail so staff, unfamiliar with the area, can find the project area; b) Project activity map – shows in greater detail, the project area and the proposed boundary of the activity area, has a recent aerial photograph as the base layer; and, c) Topographic project activity map – this is a duplicate of the project activity map with a topographic base layer. WRD GIS staff are developing procedures that will allow WRD staff to create proposals in the WRD ArcGIS online database. Once staff are trained and the GIS layers are active, all FMPs will be created and shared using this application. The approved template and map examples are attached to this SOP.

### C. Administration of Approved FMP and Forestry Related Activities

FMU staff are registered foresters and technicians. They are tasked with ensuring the legal obligations concerning forest management activities are met, whether it is a timber sale, application of herbicides, contract administration, operator compliance or Best Management Practices (BMPs). WRD does not manage the timber resources on its properties for maximum revenue but implementation of forest management projects generates critical revenue for use by the Division and will be managed in a fiscally sound and responsible manner. Timber assets are regarded as real property in the State of Georgia. As such, WRD staff have a fiduciary responsibility to manage this asset accordingly. The Program Manager for the FMU unit is legally responsible for all timber harvest contracts on WRD property and along with other staff foresters can be held professionally liable for incorrect forest management practices as well as BMP violations. Therefore, all silvicultural activities, forest management contracts, operator compliance and BMP compliance will be administered by the Forest Management Unit regardless of the funding source. Certain activities such as tree, burrow, or habitat marking may be conducted by other WRD staff under the supervision of FMU foresters or conducted independently if trained by FMU staff and approved by the FMU Program Manager and done in compliance with established protocols. If WRD staff have issues or concerns with planned or ongoing forest management activities they should immediately relay this information to the appropriate FMU staff associate. WRD has a statewide contract with a specific vendor to perform forest management activities on its properties. The contract is in place to ensure contractors are properly vetted, insured, and follow all applicable State of Georgia and federal laws.

Failure of WRD staff to adhere this policy may result in disciplinary actions.

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### **Exhibit A**

#### **Timeline of FMP Development and Implementation**

- January: FMU Program Manager provides FMP template to Region Supervisors and Program Managers.
- March 1: FMP submission deadline. Initial FMP is submitted to FMU Program Manager.
- March 15: FMP is distributed to GM Region Supervisors, WCS Environmental Review Coordinator, FMU Program Manager and the Historic Preservation Division for dissemination and review.
- April: Annual spring planning meetings are held in each region to review, discuss, make final comments on and final edits to the FMP.
- May 20: The finalized FMP is submitted to the FMU Program Manager.
- May 30: Finalized FMPs are distributed to appropriate region supervisors for review.
- June 15: Region supervisors must indicate their approval, disapproval, modification or termination of the FMPs to the FMU Program Manager.
- June 16: FMPs which cannot be agreed upon by all parties are submitted to headquarters for input and final decision.
- June 30: FMPs submitted to headquarters for review are returned to FMU Program Manager with a final decision made.
- July 1: Signed FMPs are submitted to appropriate Section Chief for signature.



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- July 15: FMPs are prioritized by Section Chiefs and returned to FMU Program Manager for distribution and implementation.

Implementation: If a timber harvest contract is utilized for FMP implementation, a copy of the contract is housed at the FMU Program Managers' office.



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### **Exhibit B**

Proposal Number: **FMU will fill this out**

#### **FY-2019 Forest Management Proposal**

**Name of WMA**

**Activity Type**

**Prepared By:** Name of persons preparing the project.

**Project Location:** In as much detail as is needed describe the project location. Use the Gazetteer as a reference.

**Project Description:** Describe, with detail, the activities to take place. If the proposal has more than one project area, describe each one independently and each should be shown on the attached maps.

- 1) Project Area 1:
- 2) Project Area 2:
- 3) Project Area 3:

**Access or Need Roadwork Cost:** Describe how the management activity will be accessed. If access requires roadwork give an estimated cost.

**Loading Deck and Logging Slash Management:** Describe what activities will be conducted on the loading decks and how logging slash will be dealt with.

**Project Cost:** The approximate cost of the project should be explored and shown by activity breakdown. Example: chemical cost, seedling cost, road cost, etc.

**Managed Hunts:** Will timber harvest or management activities need to be suspended during managed hunts? **Yes or No.** Managed, Quota or other special opportunity hunts as listed: **Please list the hunt dates.** These dates will be added to contracts.

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**Species of Concern:** Are there any known endangered, threatened, or special concern species on the site? Make sure you answer yes or no. If you answer yes then you either need to put a note to refer to WCS comments or make the comments yourself.

**Archaeological Sites:** Are there any known archaeological sites that may be impacted by this project? This should be left blank. It will be filled in based on findings by HPD. If an answer of yes is provided then HPDs comments and findings will be attached.

**Does this project meet Long-term Habitat Management Plan objectives for this area?** Make sure you answer either yes or no.

**Additional comments or concerns:** This section is for any issues not covered above. Also, it may be used by Regional Supervisor or Chief to comment on project.

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## **Exhibit C**

Proposal Number: CHIC1016171

### **Forest Management Proposal Chickasawhatchee WMA**

#### **Quail Habitat Thinning and Timber Stand Improvement (TSI)**

To be completed in FY '18

*Amendment 6/7/17 – add stand Chic0813 to thinning (in italics)*

*Amendment 10/16/17 – add two brood fields to be created (4 and 5.5 Ac.)*

**Prepared By:** Michael Staton, Alan Isler, Drew Zellner, Brian Vickery, and Seth Thompson

**Project Location:** Chickasawhatchee WMA, Dougherty County, located approximately 21 miles west of Albany, GA on SR 62 and Hwy. 37 – GA Gazetteer p. 57, A,B-7. Please see the attached maps.

#### **Project Description:**

##### **Project Area 1 Quail Habitat Thinning – 507.9 Ac**

Selective thinning consisting of 507.9 acres of planted pine stands with the following breakdown:  
Stand Chic0102 – 57.7 acres of 1988 planted loblolly pine, Chic0103 – 19.4 acres of 1988 planted loblolly pine, Chic0104 – 7.5 acres of 1980 planted loblolly pine, Chic1112 – 75.7 acres of 1988 planted loblolly pine, Chic0113 – 8.8 acres of 1980 planted loblolly pine, Chic0116 – 66.1 acres of 1988 planted loblolly pine, Chic0117 – 19.2 acres of 1988 planted loblolly pine, Chic0901 – 49 acres of 1979 planted loblolly pine, Chic0909 – 9 acres of 1979 planted loblolly pine, Chic0910 – 10.8 acres of 1973 planted slash pine, Chic0912 – 52.9 acres of 1979 planted loblolly pine, Chic0913 – 45.1 acres of 1979 planted

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loblolly pine, Chic0915 – 59.8 acres of 1979 planted loblolly pine, and Chic0919 – 26.9 acres of 1979 planted loblolly pine, *add Chic0813 – 46.8 acres of 1970 loblolly pine (because of location).*

Activities will consist of a marked thinning in stands Chic0102, 0103, 0104, 0112, 0113, 0116, and 0117. These stands total 254.4 acres and have been operator select thinned once in the past. Stands Chic0901, 0909, 0910, 0912, 0913, 0915, 0919, *and 0813* will be either operator select thinned with demonstration areas or contract marked. These stands total 300.1 acres and were previously marked for a second thinning. See activity maps for details.

Timber marking will most likely consist of marking the leave trees on two sides (facing existing takeout rows) or with a ring of timber marking paint. If contract marking is used, FMU staff will monitor the marking. FMU will be responsible for the marking in the stands that are proposed for marking and for installing demo areas if an operator select method of thinning is used instead of contract marking in the other stands. Region V will be responsible for the costs associated with any contract marking.

The target residual basal area will be 40 ft<sup>2</sup> per acre to promote bobwhite quail habitat, increase sunlight penetration to the ground, and to increase forage and browse. Selective thinning will be from below removing diseased, suppressed, forked, and poorly formed trees first. Undesirable hardwood species such as water oak, sweetgum, and blackgum will be removed during the thinning and desirable/upland oak species such as post oak, southern red oak, turkey oak, and larger live oak will be promoted and thinned if needed.

Main WMA roads may be day lighted to a maximum 30 feet from the edge of the road in stands that are being thinned and secondary roads/firebreaks may be day lighted to a maximum of 15 feet. Firebreaks in proposed stands that form property lines may be widened up to 30 feet if Best Management Practices are followed. Indicated wildlife openings totaling 82.6 acres will be created per the Biologist's and Area Manager's recommendations.

Wildlife openings and logging decks may be cleared, stumped, burned, and harrowed. If feasible, stumps may be harvested and sold.

Chemical or mechanical (mowing, chopping, mulching) treatments may be used in these stands after the thinning has been completed to achieve the desired groundcover. Herbicide treatment methods and prescription rates and types will be chosen based on individual stand situations in consultation with

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herbicide representatives, FMU, and Region V personnel. Herbicides will be chosen based on their impact on desirable groundcover and their effectiveness in controlling unwanted hardwood species.

Alternative stand regeneration methods may be implemented in some of the proposed stands in the future as the understory conditions improve. These methods may include “gap” regeneration and/or interplanting. Chemical and/or mechanical site preparation will be used to establish longleaf pine seedlings (preferred) up to 605 TPA. Herbicide treatment methods and prescription rates and types will be chosen based on individual stand situations in consultation with herbicide representatives, FMU, and Region V personnel.

Stands may be released from the thinning contract after the thinning has been completed and before the contract has expired to allow wildlife management activities to be conducted. Such activities may include but are not limited to mulching, mowing, chopping, burning, and herbicide applications. This release will be in the form of an addendum to the contract and will release the timber buyer of liability from any issues that may result from the above-mentioned management activities but will not release the timber buyer from and needed road work, BMP work, or logging deck work that needs to be completed per the contractual obligations.

## **Project Area 2 Timber Stand Improvement – (TSI)**

Timber stand improvement consisting of 335.9 acres in stands Chic1227 – 8.9 acres of 1997 planted slash, Chic1601 – 48.4 acres of 2000 planted slash pine, Chick1607 – 40.9 acres of 2000 planted slash pine, Chic1702 – 65.9 acres of 1997 planted slash pine, Chick1706 – 23.9 acres of 1998 planted slash pine, Chic1709 – 15.1 acres of 1998 planted slash pine, Chic1726 – 71.9 acres of 1997 planted slash pine, Chic2009 – 44.7 acres of 1998 planted slash pine, and Chic2301 – 16.3 acres of 1997 planted slash pine. Activities will consist of the ground application release of the residual planted slash pine and will involve mechanical and/or chemical treatment to control unwanted hardwood including sweetgum and wateroak. Herbicide treatment methods and prescription rates and types will be chosen based on the stand situation in consultation with herbicide representatives, FMU, and Region V personnel. The herbicide application must remove the unwanted species with minimal damage to the residual desirable ground cover if any exists.

**Timber Inventory:** The project areas incorporate \_\_ acres from the \_\_\_\_\_ timber inventory.

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**Total Acreage Impacted: 843.8**

**Access, Roadwork, and TSI Costs:** Roadwork - \$5,000 / TSI - \$30,000

**Loading Deck and Logging Slash Management:** Please see attached maps for the approved log deck locations. *Additional decks (2) required for stand Chic0813 are both previously used decks.* Harvest slash will be evenly distributed back into the thinned stands with the skidder. Tree tops should be ran over in the woods prior to processing in order to remove as many limbs as possible in the stands. Slash should be removed from the decks as much as possible with the skidder and no slash or tree butt piles should be within 30' of residual trees. Decks should be properly retired within one week of moving to a new deck location. Slash on decks may be chipped if possible and deemed feasible.

**Managed Hunts:** Will harvest activities need to be suspended during managed hunts? Quota hunt dates will be avoided.

**Species of Concern:** Are there any known endangered, threatened, or special concern species on the site? Please see the attached WCS comments.

**Archaeological Sites:** Are there any known archaeological sites that may be impacted by this project? Please see the attached HPD comments.

**Does this project meet 50-year plan objectives for this area?** Yes

**Additional comments or concerns:**

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Regional Supervisor

Date\_\_\_\_\_

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Section Chief

Date\_\_\_\_\_



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WCS Program Manager

Date\_\_\_\_\_

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FMU Program Manager

Date\_\_\_\_\_



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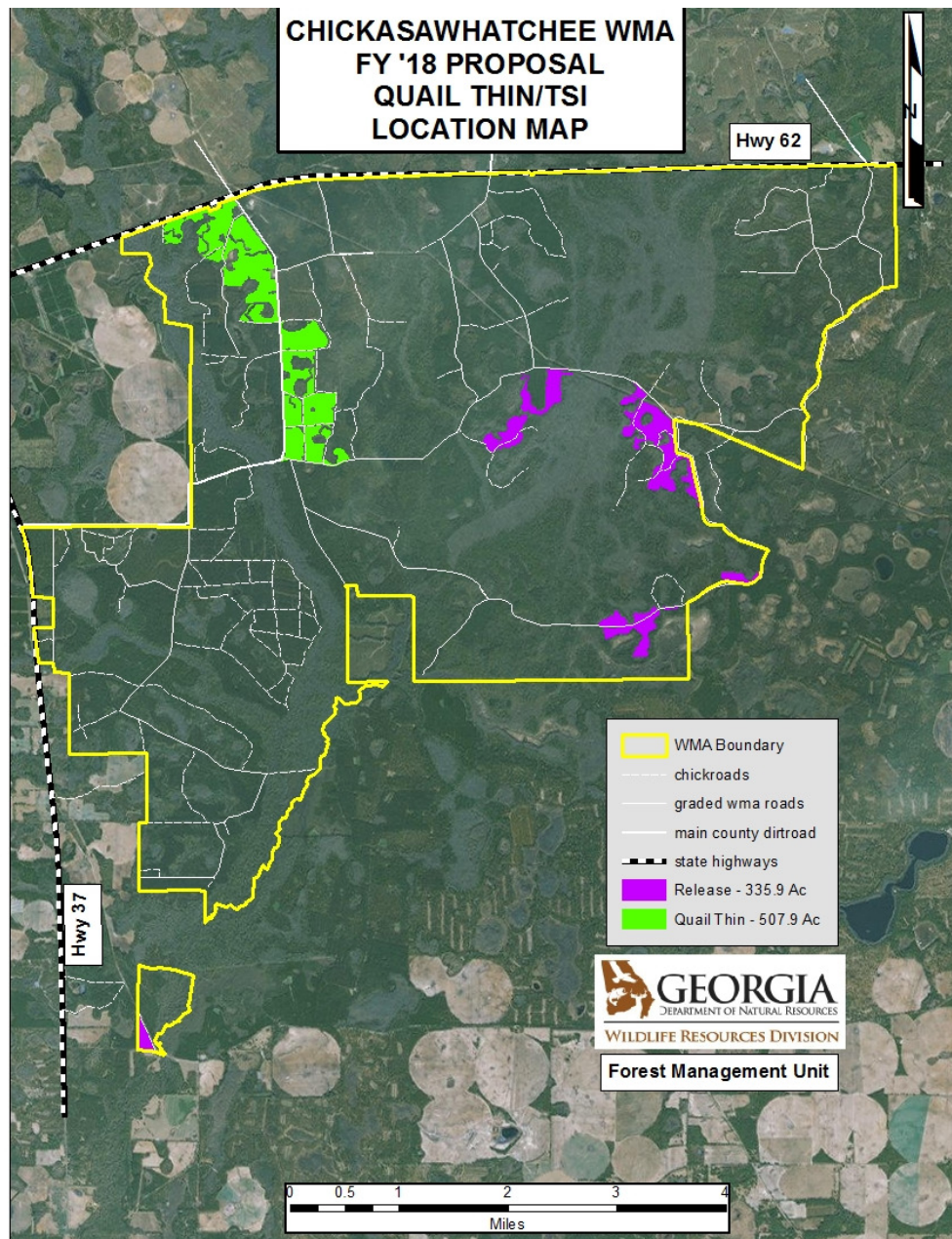
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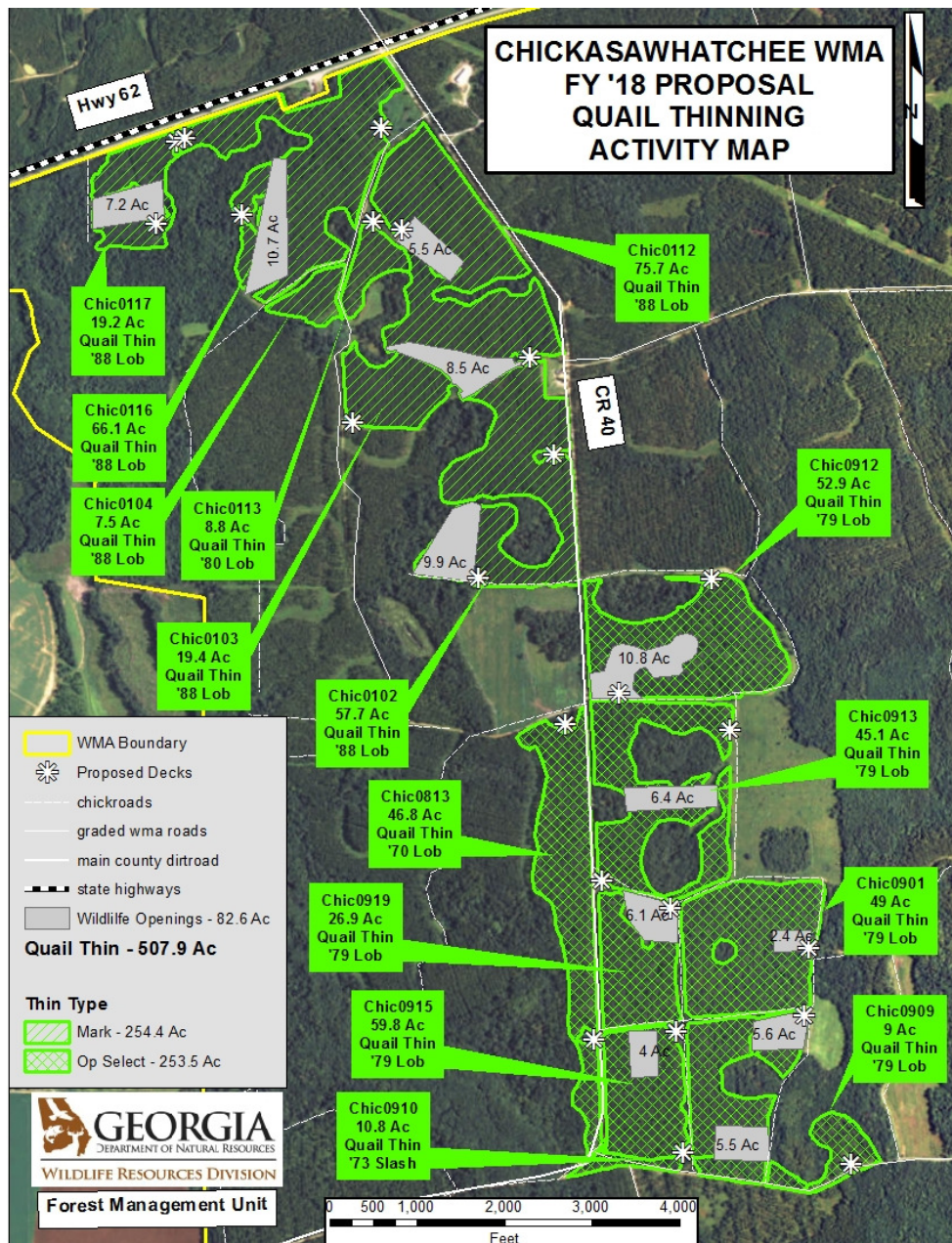
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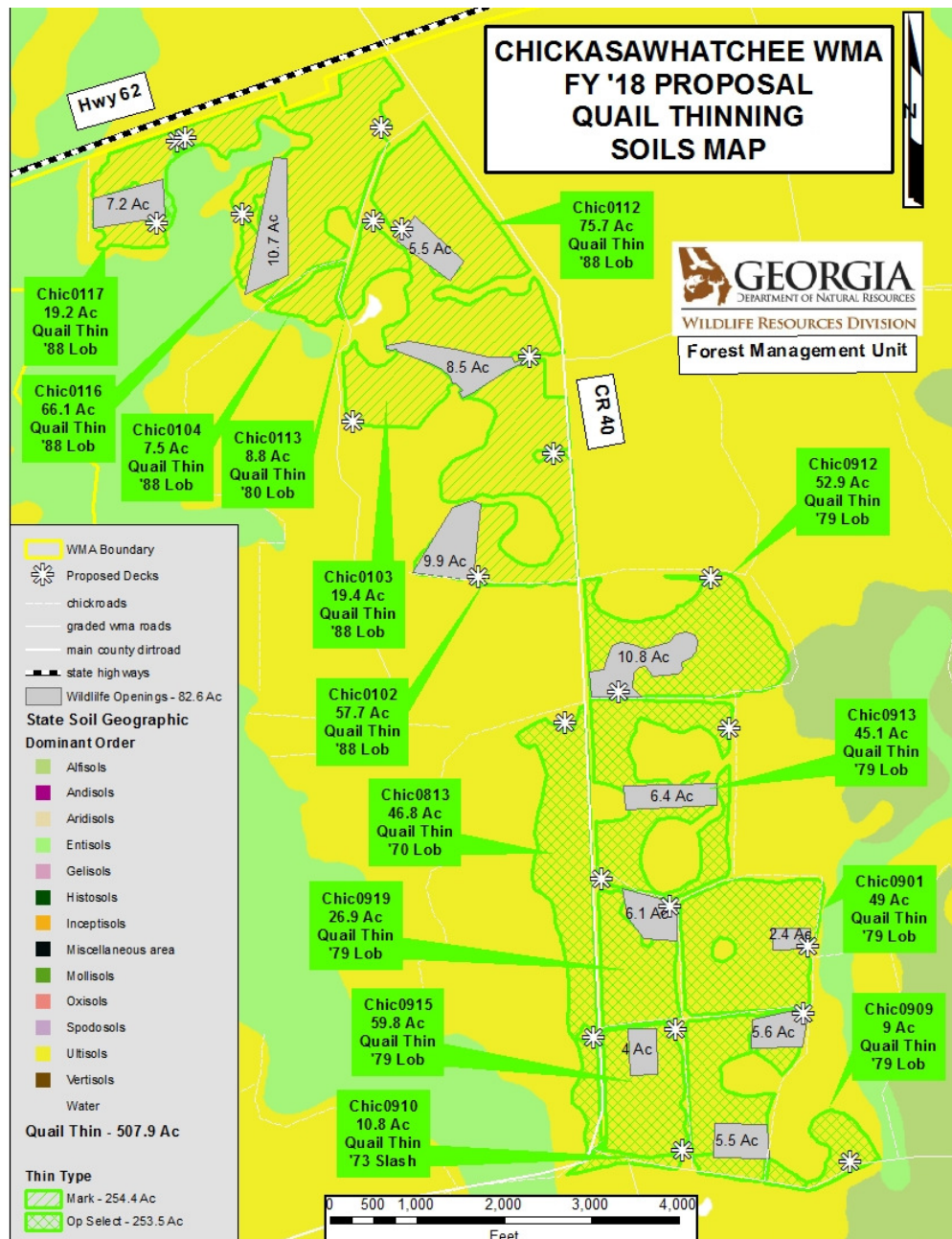
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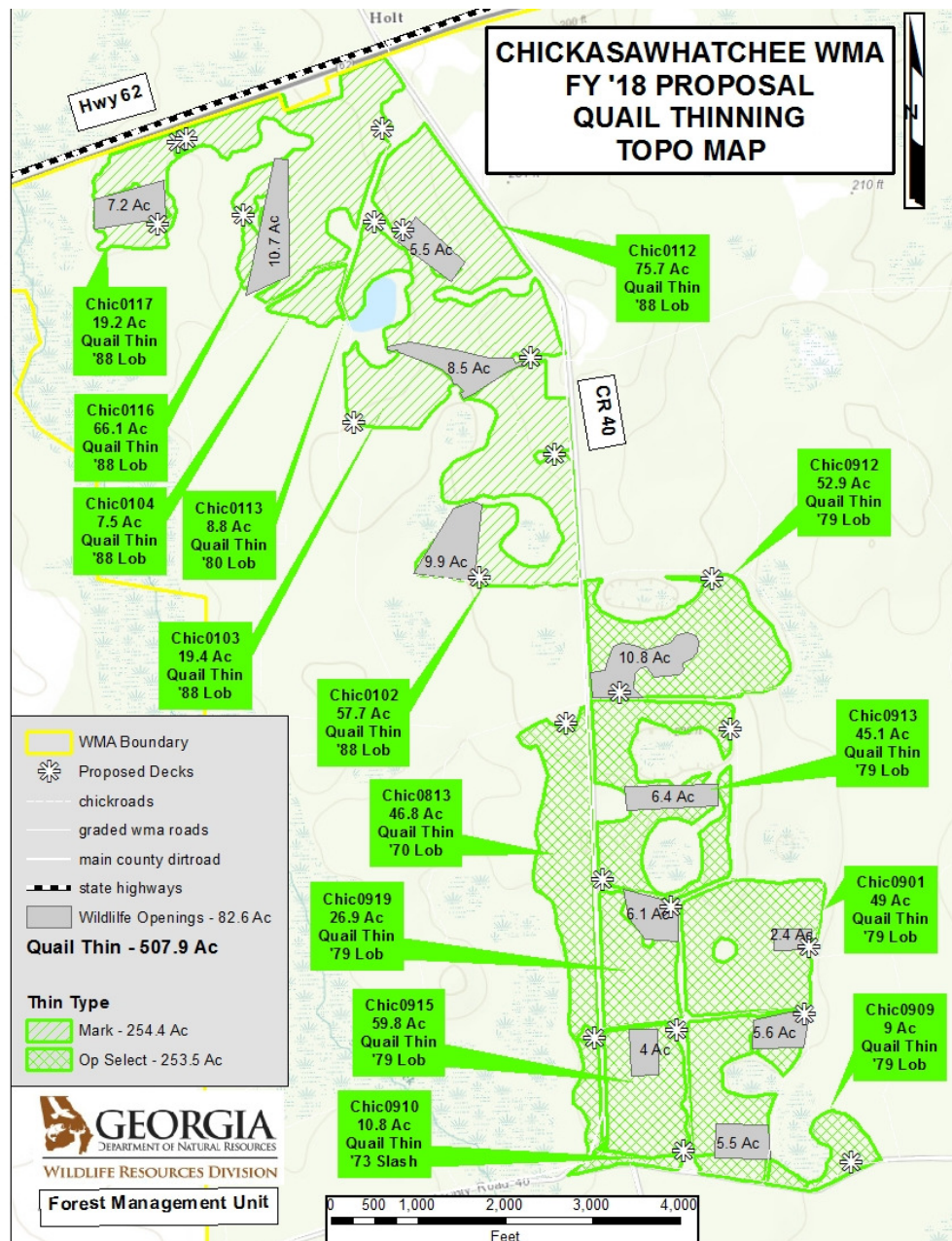
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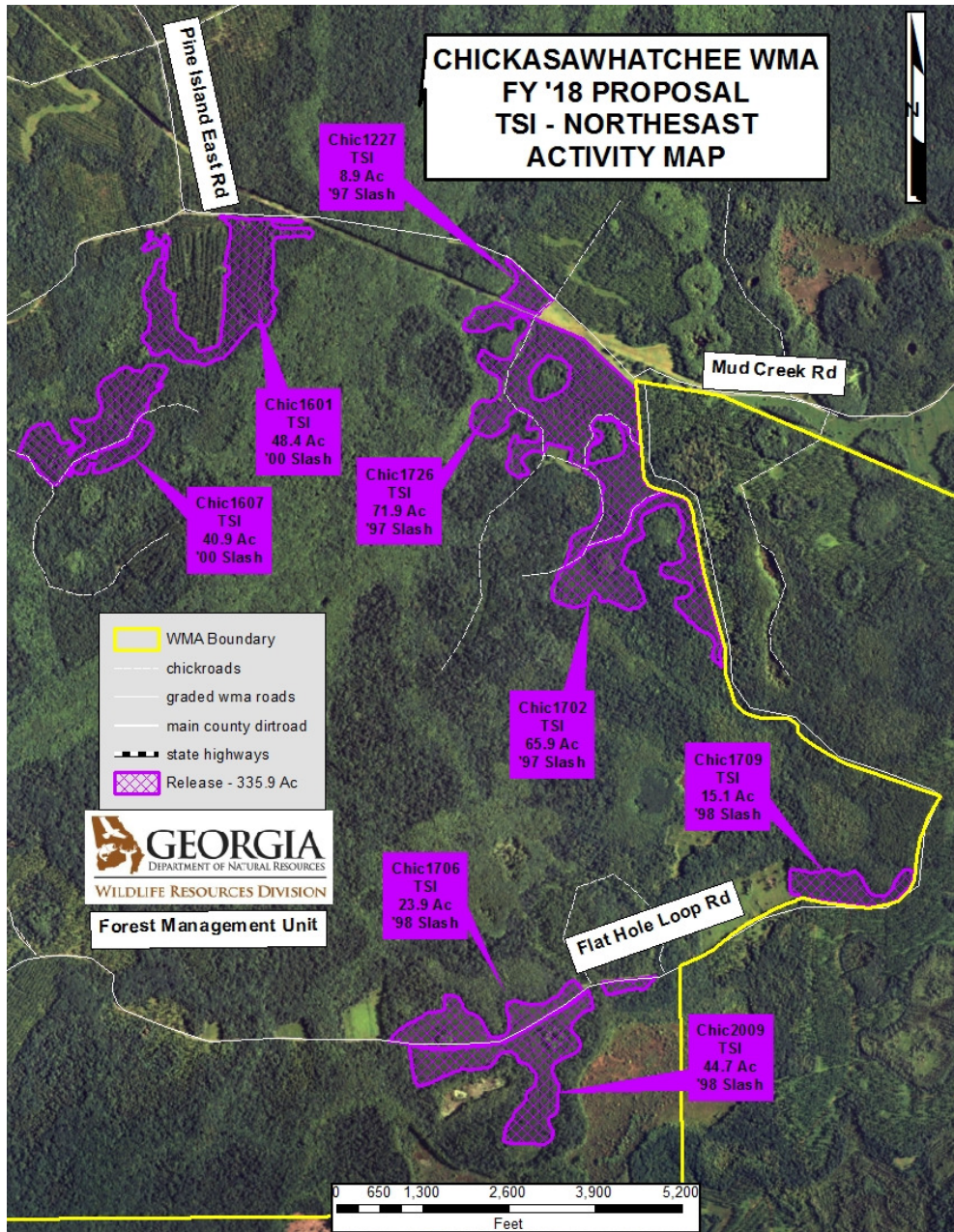
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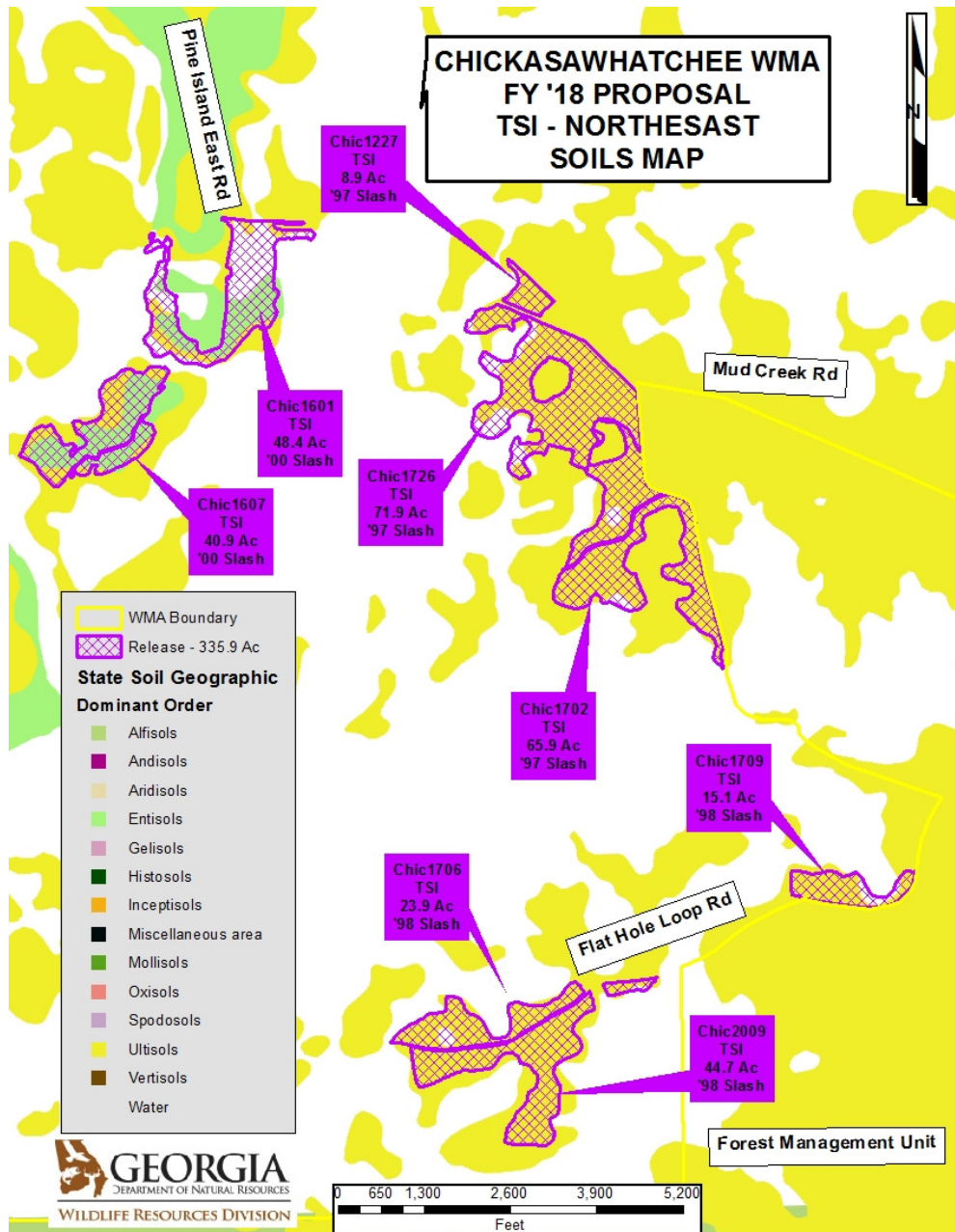
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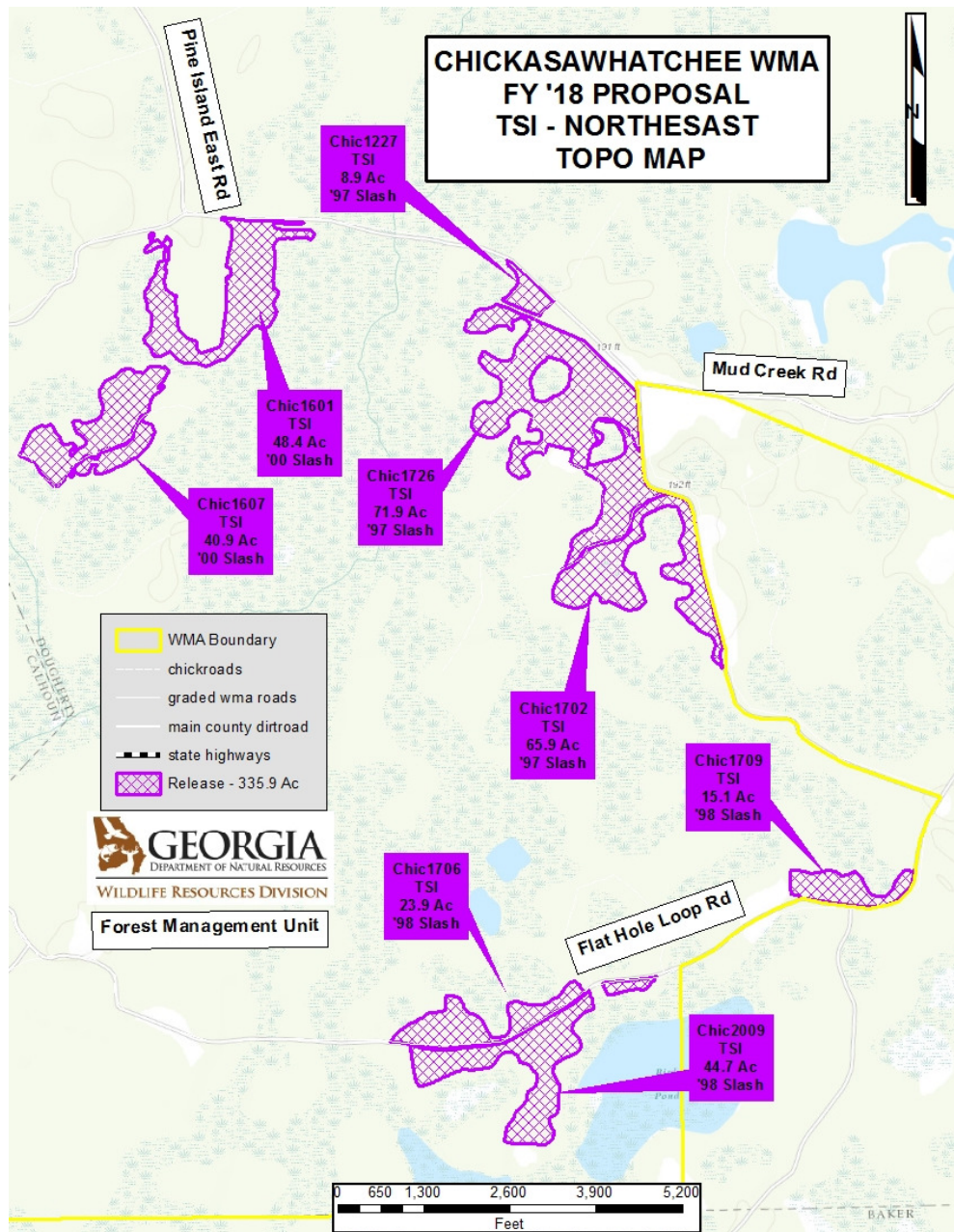
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