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Responses to Questions from Citizen Advisory Board Meeting on March 28, 2016

1) What kind of destruction would feral hogs do if left unchecked?

Feral hogs are very prolific breeders with the potential to breed up to three times a year. Litter sizes may be as large as 12 piglets with an average of five to eight piglets per litter. Population sizes can grow from an insufficient number to an overabundance in just a short period in time.

Control measures are in place and help alleviate:

- Predation of several ground nesting birds.
- Rooting and disturbing native plant communities.
- Disease transmission, between feral hog with possibility of disease transfer to humans and domesticated animals.
- Abundant soil disturbance.
- Degradation of water quality.
- Increased human interaction and vehicle collisions.

2) Is there an option for oral birth control methods to be dispersed to wildlife?

Currently, no oral method can be used for feral hog birth control measures. Research across the nation is actively being performed to come up with methods to address this concern.

3) Which endangered species does the USDA Forest Service-Savannah River manage, and which is the largest?

Five federally listed species exist on the Savannah River Site (SRS): the **smooth coneflower** (*Echinacea laevigata*), **pondberry** (*Lindera melissifolia*), **Atlantic sturgeon** (*Acipenser oxyrinchus oxyrinchus*), **short-nose sturgeon** (*Acipenser brevirostrum*), and the **Red-cockaded Woodpecker** (*Picoides borealis*).

- **Smooth Coneflowers:** SRS manages four wild populations of cone-flowers. Management action consists of control of competing vegetation primarily through the use of prescribed fire, mechanical removal, and very selective chemical (cut stump) treatments. Competing vegetation would include non-native invasive species like Chinese privet. Intense annual botanical surveys are conducted on the SRS to locate new populations of smooth

coneflowers as well as to monitor the status of them.

- **Pondberry:** One population of pondberry is found in a Carolina Bay wetland on the SRS. No management is done to influence the natural hydrology of the bay. Timber will be removed (thinning operation) in adjoining buffer area to provide more available sunlight to population. Prescribed fire is not a tool we use in the bay as fire will not carry due to the extended period of time the wetland is covered in water. Intense annual botanical surveys are conducted on the SRS to locate new populations of these endangered species as well as to monitor the status of them.
- **Atlantic Sturgeon:** The Atlantic sturgeon is a long-lived, estuarine dependent, anadromous fish that can grow to approximately 14 feet long and can weigh up to 800 lbs. Anadromous fish are born in fresh water and spends most of its life in the sea and returns to fresh water to spawn. Atlantic sturgeon are in the Savannah River adjacent to the SRS, but there is no suitable riverine habitat associated on the SRS for this fish. Biological evaluations address this issue to insure habitat is not degraded or lost.
- **Short-Nose Sturgeon:** The short-nose sturgeon is the smallest of the three sturgeon species that occur in eastern North America; they grow up to 4.7 feet and weigh up to 51 pounds. Short-nose sturgeon are in the Savannah River adjacent to the SRS, but there is no suitable riverine habitat associated on the SRS for the fish. Biological evaluations address this issue to insure habitat is not degraded or lost.
- **Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW):** Presently, the RCW is one of the most heavily managed species at the SRS. The US Forest Service was commissioned by the Department of Energy (DOE) in the 1950's to convert the once heavily dominated agricultural area into a forested landscape. Since that time, properly maintained habitat has aided in the recovery efforts of the RCW.

4) What is the explanation of the initial decrease of the RCW population, and why is it important to restore the population?

Prior to the European settlement, RCW populations were estimated to be 1 to 1.5 million in the historic range throughout the southeast with over 60 million acres in habitat. By 1968, the population had been reduced to 10,000 RCWs and only 3 million acres of suitable habitat throughout its range. With settlement and the loss of virgin pine forest from logging operation and conversion from pine forest to agriculture, the habitat was diminishing. Population decline was heavily influenced by the dramatic decline of the long leaf pine ecosystem and habitat degradation due to fire suppression throughout the southeast. The long leaf pine ecosystem has important ecological effects and plays host to a variety of species that use the same ecosystem or habitat.

The RCW is a keystone species and provide nesting, roosting and or escape for vertebrates: 14 birds, four mammals, two amphibians and four reptiles. A keystone species is critical for the survival of other species in its community. If a keystone species is driven to extinction it is likely

that other species will also disappear. Many animals depend on these keystone species for food or other benefits that aid in their survival.

5) What happens to feral hogs carcasses?

Hog carcasses are disposed of on the SRS. Feral hogs do carry known diseases that can be transmitted to humans and livestock. Two of the most common diseases are swine brucellosis and pseudorabies.

6) Explain the reforestation process?

Before a stand is harvested, a prescription is developed utilizing an interdisciplinary team to determine the best tree species for the site. Once the stand has been harvested, the reforestation team evaluates the stand for site preparation prior to planting seedling. Site preparations can be one or more of the following: burning logging debris, herbicide application for unwanted plant species, clearing log deck debris or no action. Next, seedling are planted using a tree planting machine that is pulled by a bull dozer. The target of seedlings per acre is approximately 500 to 750. The whole process can take up to two years.

7) Do you work with the biomass facility, and if so, how?

We have a good working relationship with Ameresco and occasionally discuss opportunities to pursue biomass sales. We regularly inform Ameresco of upcoming opportunities to bid on our timber sales. We also sell to some of their contracted suppliers.

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Savannah River