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Forest Service
Southern Region

Record of Decision Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Plan

National Forests in Alabama





Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the National Forests in Alabama

Bibb, Calhoun, Cherokee, Chilton, Clay, Cleburne, Coosa, Covington, Dallas,
Escambia, Franklin, Hale, Lawrence, Macon, Perry, Talladega, Tuscaloosa, and
Winston Counties, Alabama

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I. Introduction

This public Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale for approving the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan) for National Forests in Alabama. This Revised Forest Plan will guide all resource management activities on the National Forests in Alabama for the next 10 to 15 years.

The National Forests in Alabama includes approximately 666,000 acres of National Forest System land in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, Cumberland Plateau, Piedmont and Coastal Plain areas of the State. There are four National Forests, divided into six ranger districts. The Bankhead National Forest is located in the northwestern part of the state in Lawrence, Winston and Franklin Counties. The Conecuh National Forest is located in the southern part of the state along the Alabama/Florida line in Covington and Escambia Counties. The Talladega National Forest is divided into three Ranger Districts. The Oakmulgee District lies in the central part of the state, east of Tuscaloosa in Hale, Tuscaloosa, Bibb, Perry, Chilton and Dallas Counties. The Shoal Creek and Talladega Districts are located in the northeastern part of the state in Cherokee, Calhoun, Cleburne, Talladega, Clay and Coosa Counties. The Tuskegee National Forest in east central part of the state west of Auburn, in Macon County.

This Forest Plan is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA), the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), and the 2000 Revision of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) requires all forests in the National Forest System to develop plans that direct resource management activities on the forests. These plans are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10- to 15-year cycle.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Revised Forest Plan were developed according to the NFMA, its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219 (dated September 30, 1982 and as amended), the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), and the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies and how they respond to issues and concerns.

This decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the National Forests in Alabama. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the Forest are also considered.

II. My Decision

I selected Alternative I from the FEIS for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Alabama. By selecting Alternative I, I am approving the Revised Forest Plan that describes the goals, objectives, standards, management prescriptions, and lands suitable for timber production for Alternative I. Among the goals outlined in the Revised Plan we intend to:

- Emphasize the restoration of native communities
- Create habitat conditions beneficial to native wildlife (game and non-game)
- Protect Threatened, Endangered, sensitive and locally rare species
- Protect rare communities
- Protect watershed health, riparian ecosystems, and aquatic habitat
- Provide appropriate level of recreational opportunities
- Improve forest health and lower risk to catastrophic losses from insects, disease, or wildfire
- Use prescribed fire to manage fire evolved ecosystems at a frequency and intensity to mimic natural occurrence while protecting life and property
- Provide for opportunities for exploration and development of oil and gas while protecting natural systems
- Be responsive to the Forest Health Initiative, and the Roadless Rule
- Be responsive to public issues

A. Components of the Decision

Components of forest plan decisions are outlined in the National Forest Management Act (1976). A forest plan establishes a framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, interdisciplinary program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the Forest. A forest plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, by applying forest-wide management direction, the forest plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.

The decisions I am making in this ROD for the Revised Forest Plan are:

1. *Establishment of forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11 (b))*

Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan contains forest-wide direction including multiple-use goals and objectives. The goals and objectives focus on achieving the desired conditions for the Forest. The goals focus on direction for ecosystem restoration, conservation of biodiversity, sustainable forest management responsive

to recovery needs of the red cockaded woodpecker, maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitats, providing recreational opportunities, and contributing to social and economic health of local communities. The objectives provide specific outcomes for accomplishing the goals.

2. *Establishment of forest-wide management requirements (standards) (36 CFR 219.27)*

Forest-wide standards are found in Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan. Standards are limitations on actions or thresholds not to be exceeded. I believe that the standards provide adequate direction for management, provide for resource protection, and serve to illustrate the intent of the Revised Forest Plan. To simplify the planning document, direction that would duplicate laws, policies, Forest Service Manual, and Forest Service Handbook direction or other regional directives is not included.

3. *Establishment of management prescriptions and where they should be applied. (36 CFR 219.11 (c))*

Management prescriptions are found in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan. Each prescription outlines a reference of desired condition, the likely future management practices to achieve the desired conditions, and standards. Twenty-five distinct management prescriptions will guide the design and implementation of future actions. Where these management prescriptions should be applied is shown on the Forest Plan Management Prescription Map. In some areas, such as wilderness, legal boundaries are specified by congressional acts. In others, boundaries are identified using ecological units, administrative boundaries, or other physical features. Four management prescriptions, riparian corridors, rare communities, canyon corridors, and old growth, are embedded within the broader context of the 25 management prescriptions cited above, in order to clarify management of smaller and unique lands.

4. *Determination of land that is suitable for timber production (36 CFR 219.14) and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber (36 CFR 219.16)*

The designation of lands suitable for timber production is found in Chapter 3 and Appendix E of the Revised Forest Plan. Approximately 389,000 acres or 59 percent of the Forest are designated suitable for timber production. The ASQ is found in Chapter 3 FEIS. The Revised Forest Plan projects an average annual ASQ of 8.5 MMCF (million cubic feet) for the next 10 years. The present budget levels, along with a projected slight increase in operational costs should provide sufficient funds to meet this ASQ.

5. *Areas recommended for special designation. Wilderness study areas recommended to Congress. [36 CFR 219.17]*

The plan map displays those areas that are recommended for wilderness status. Two areas have been recommended as additions to existing wilderness. The plan

map displays sections of two rivers, the Cahaba and Five Runs that will be managed as eligible for Wild and Scenic river designation.

6. *Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11(d))*

These are found in Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan. Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to the Revised Forest Plan goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, and specific regulatory requirements. These requirements ensure that my approach is adaptive and sustainability is being achieved or adjustments will be made.

7. *Determination of lands administratively available for oil and gas leasing (36 CFR 228.102 (d)) and consent to lease the available lands (36 CFR 228.102 (e)).*

The National Forests in Alabama has 80,337 acres or 12% of the Forests are 100% private mineral rights, and 42,327 acres or 6 % of the Forests are acres designated as Wilderness and/or Wild & Scenic River, which are withdrawn from any type of mineral development. Of the remaining acres available for oil and gas leasing 356,186 or 65% are available with standard terms, 157,430 or 29% are available with controlled surface use and 29,431 or 5% are available with no surface occupancy. I consent to let the Bureau of Land Management lease these available lands (543,047 acres).

B. Rationale for Decision

I have decided to select Alternative I as the Revised Forest Plan for the NFsAL. I believe the Revised Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and that this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability. The Revised Plan is responsive to the Forest Service's National Strategic Plan (2000), and it meets our legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. The optimal implementation rate for the Revised Forest Plan could require higher funding levels in some areas than those currently allocated; however, I believe the management direction changes envisioned in the Revised Plan can be implemented under current budget levels. The attainment of desired conditions and outputs in some areas, however, may be prolonged or reduced if future budgets decrease.

Responding to the Issues

The following discussions summarize many of the important factors that I considered. They explain why I believe Alternative I, as described in the FEIS, will maximize net public benefits when compared to the other alternatives. The response of each alternative to the 19 significant issues was a major consideration in the decision to select Alternative I. The reasons for choosing the Selected Alternative are discussed

below on an issue-by-issue basis. Chapter 3 of the FEIS describes in detail the effects of expected management actions on the various Forest resources.

The issues developed for the Southern Appalachian Forest as they relate to the National Forests in Alabama are:

Issue # 1 - Terrestrial Plants and Animals and their Associated Habitats: The Revised Forest Plan emphasizes the restoration and maintenance of naturally occurring forested landscapes and communities. The forest-wide direction in Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan contains goals and objectives for restoring and maintaining naturally occurring forest communities and providing habitat for a variety of species.

All of the alternatives analyzed in detail provide habitat for the wide variety of species that inhabit our Forest, however, Alternatives B and I have the least numbers of at risk species as a result of management and Alternatives A, D and F have the highest numbers of at risk species as a result of management.

I have chosen Alternative I because of the balance it brings to management of terrestrial species habitat. Despite the Selected Alternative's recognition of the importance of early-successional forest habitat, the Forest will continue to provide a successional forest mix dominated by late-successional forests.

Issue # 2 - Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive/Locally Rare Species: The Revised Plan protects Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive species (PETS) and provide habitat for a wide variety of other wildlife species. Between the draft and final we entered into informal consultation of the Biological Assessment and revised the Proposed Revised Plan accordingly to assure protection of PETS. The determinations of the BA are summarized in Section V of this decision. The biological evaluation was prepared to address protection of sensitive species. Additional information concerning locally rare species is discussed under issue #10.

Each alternative was compared (Chapter 2 and in the Appendix to the EIS) to evaluate the relative affect it would have on threatened, endangered, sensitive and locally rare species (TES&LR). Impacts to aquatic TES&LR species were assessed based on Forest-wide standards relevant to streamside filter zones and riparian prescription (RX11) width standards.

With the exception of Alternative F, all alternatives include the latest strategies for management and recovery of threatened, endangered and sensitive species as a result of our close collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Rare communities are an important part of our strategy to protect and recover threatened, endangered, sensitive, or locally rare species. We worked with the State of Alabama to identify rare communities and special biological areas because they contribute significantly to plant and animal diversity, particularly the TES&LR species. All alternatives except Alternative F, set aside these special areas for management to conserve and improve their natural composition, structure, and functions in order to support the rare species associated with them. Alternative I does the best job of

protecting threatened, endangered, sensitive, or locally rare species while also addressing the remaining significant issues in a balanced manner.

Issue # 3 - Old Growth: The issue surrounding old growth has several facets, including: (1) how much old growth is desired, (2) where should old growth occur, and (3) how should old growth be managed?

The Forest Service has identified old growth as an important issue both internally and with the public. In 1989, Dale Robertson, the Forest Service chief at the time, developed a generic definition of old-growth forests (USDA memo, 1989). Old-growth forests are ecosystems distinguished by old trees and related structural attributes. Old growth encompasses the later stages of stand development that typically differ from earlier stages in a variety of characteristics which may include tree size, accumulation of large wood material, number of canopy layers, species composition, and ecosystem function.

The Revised Plan protects all existing old growth and provides for the identification, mapping and protection of future old growth. While the Alternatives vary in the amount of old growth maintained in each community type, I believe that Alternative I does the best job of balancing these.

Issue # 4 - Riparian Area Management, Water Quality, and Aquatic Habitats: Streamside management zones and protections for ephemeral streams were brought forward from the previous plan. In addition, riparian corridor protections for intermittent and perennial streams are designated and applied, superceding other allocations in the selected alternative. The Revised Plan provides for coordination and cooperation with partners in provided for aquatic beneficial uses including TES.

Because of the importance of the riparian areas in maintaining all resource values, each of the alternatives provides standards and best management practices to protect the water flowing through the National Forest. However, in terms of comparison, Table 2-6, in Chapter 2 of the EIS, shows how the Alternatives differ on this issue. The table shows percentage increase in sediment yield due to Forest Service activities, compared to existing (base) levels of sediment yield. Of all the alternatives Alternative I would have the smallest percent increase in sediment yield from the Forest.

Issue # 5 - Wood Products: Alternative I emphasize the restoration and maintenance of naturally occurring forested landscapes and communities. Although wood production is a by-product of this management, timber harvest in Alternative I is approached as one of the primary tools for restoration and does not have an objective for production of wood fiber. The Revised Plan designates approximately 389,000 acres or 59 percent of the Forest as suitable for timber production and the total ten year allowable sale quantity of timber (ASQ) would be 85.3 million cubic feet in the first decade.

Where forest management activities are needed and appropriate to achieve the desired composition, structure, and function of forest ecosystems an additional benefit will be a sustainable supply of wood products for local needs.

Issue # 6 - Aesthetic/Scenery Management: Large portions of the National Forests in Alabama can be seen from adjacent or interior roads, trails or waterways largely due to the density of the various travel routes. Twenty-five percent of National Forest land is classified as foreground. The more scenic landscapes (those in Retention and Partial Retention Vegetation Management System(VMS) or in High or Moderate Scenery Management System (SMS)) are generally associated with or occur adjacent to important roads, lakes, rivers and streams, or highly developed recreation areas and National Trails. Elevations on the National Forest in Alabama range from a high point at Odum Point (2342') just off Talladega Mountain to lower elevations of less than 150 feet in the Conecuh and Yellow River valleys of the Conecuh Ranger District. Views beyond the immediate foreground are influenced by vegetation type, vegetation density, and terrain. Topography ranges from steep ridges, to relatively flat coastal plains, to deeply dissected dendritic drained landforms. The forest is covered with an almost-continuous canopy of soft- to medium-textured rounded tree forms, creating a natural-appearing landscape character. The Revised Forest Plan provides for various levels of scenery management, taking into consideration "special places", and strives to provide high quality scenery by restoring and maintaining healthy forest ecosystems.

Of the alternatives, the one I have selected would provide the largest proportion of national forest acres in moderate to moderately high scenic integrity objectives but balances the amount of lands allocated to sensitive viewsheds, providing more than some alternatives to this prescription and less than others.

Issue # 7 - Recreation Opportunities/Experiences: The National Forests in Alabama provide approximately 666,000 acres of public land scattered in five blocks throughout the state. The National Forests in Alabama comprise a highly scarce resource – islands of undeveloped public lands in the midst of agricultural and urban development. The Forests are exceptional because they are scattered across the state in four distinct physiographic regions, resulting in unusual ecological diversity and landscapes. They are repositories of numerous rare species and will become even more ecologically significant with the restoration of native forest communities. The National Forests in Alabama will be increasingly important as urban escapes and at the same time, they will continue to be backyard playgrounds for nearby rural residents. Outdoor recreation opportunities on National Forests in Alabama are many and varied. The selected alternative considers increasing demand, limited resources and the capacity of the land to provide a spectrum of high quality recreation settings and opportunities.

I feel that Alternative I provide the best balance of recreational opportunities. Of all the alternatives I considered, Alternative I allocates the highest number of acres to Semi-primitive motorized Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class and, on the other end of the spectrum as well, to the rural/urban class. In addition, Alternative I

provide the largest proportion of the forestlands to the backcountry allocation and the next highest amount to the recreation emphasis prescription.

Issue # 8 - Roadless Areas/Wilderness Management: In the forest planning process, National Forests are required to assess their inventoried roadless areas (Chapter 7 of FSH 1909.12). A new roadless inventory was conducted as a part of the Southern Appalachian Assessment with additional guidelines developed by the SAA team and the Southern Regional Office of the Forest Service to facilitate consistent application of the process.

The plan map displays those Roadless areas that are recommended for wilderness study status. Two areas, Cheaha A and a portion of Cheaha B on the Talladega Division, have been recommended as additions to the existing Cheaha Wilderness. Chapter 3 of the Revised Plan describes the management of these recommended areas. Those Roadless areas that are not recommended for wilderness study have been assigned management prescriptions consistent with maintaining their Roadless character, as discussed in Chapter 3C of the FEIS.

Blue Mountain – This area has been designated as Remote Back Country non-motorized for several reasons. Blue Mountain on the Talladega Division contains the Oxford-Cheaha Road with a focal point of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) constructed bridge at Hillabee Creek. The construction improvements on this road provide excellent examples of stone workmanship. The road is currently being studied as a National Register Historic District. The Blue Mountain Shelter is another improvement within the Blue Mountain Roadless area. This shelter would have to be removed or relocated to conform to wilderness polices. Finally, although the size of the area is sufficient by eastern standards, the lack of significant acreage and the boundary of the Talladega Scenic Drive reduce the opportunities for solitude and challenge.

Cheaha B – A portion of the Cheaha B Roadless Area has been designated as Dispersed Recreation with specific management direction to maintain Roadless character. This portion of the area is bounded by a county road and by private lands, which will affect the solitude of the area. The natural appearance of the area has been affected by several low development roads and evidence of past timber activity both on national forest and recent timber activity on private lands. The existence of roads within the area and private land development diminish the level of challenge. Finally, the adjacent private land would add a degree of complexity to wildfire management.

Oakey Mountain – Oakey Mountain on the Talladega Division has been designated as Remote Backcountry with Few Open Roads. The area is arranged in an irregular pattern that is bounded entirely by roads, private land, or the Chief Ladiga Rail Trail. This pattern results in a highly varied degree of influence from developments and other influences outside the area. This pattern also would diminish the effectiveness of preservation management inside the boundaries. The area contains two watershed lakes with constructed earthen dams that require regular maintenance, and removal is not a practical option.

Reed Brake Roadless - The Reed Brake Roadless area is made up entirely of the Reed Brake Research Natural Area and has been designated as a Research Natural Area. This area has been actively managed for the Endangered Red Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) and contains 4 active and 4 inactive RCW aggregates of cavity trees (called clusters). Management of this species requires frequent man-caused interruptions in the operation of natural forces taking place in the area. Designation would add a layer of increased complexity to the prescribed management for RCW. Because Reed Brake is so small (approximately 600 acres) the use of the area does not require outdoor skill above those typically necessary for routine forest use. The size of the area, little more than a mile at the widest point, does not provide a core area within the boundaries.

I chose Alternative I because it maintains all of the Forest's inventoried roadless areas in their current condition. The roadless characteristics may in this way be maintained during this plan period.

Issue # 9 - Forest Health: This issue is related to several of the other issues. The Revised Forest Plan emphasizes the restoration and maintenance of naturally occurring forested landscapes and communities to provide a desired composition, structure, and function. Emphasis is placed on maintaining forest and plant community types not abundant on non-national forest lands. The forest-wide direction in Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan contains goals and objectives for restoring and maintaining naturally occurring forest communities. The Revised Forest Plan emphasizes the restoration and maintenance of naturally occurring forested landscapes and communities to provide a desired composition, structure and function. Emphasis is placed on maintaining forest and plant community types not abundant on non-national forest lands. The forest-wide direction in the Revised Forest Plan contains goals and objectives for restoring and maintaining naturally occurring forest communities.

The Revised Forest Plan addresses this issue by emphasizing:

- Management of National Forest ecosystems, either through restoration or maintenance, to provide the desired composition (species mix), structure (age class distribution), function (resulting benefits), and productivity over time and
- Reduction of the impacts from native or nonnative invasive species.

A healthy, resilient forest includes clean water, clean air, fertile soils, and abundant fish and wildlife populations. By the same token, healthy forest vegetation determine the health of our watersheds and soils, our riparian and aquatic ecosystems, the quality of habitat for wildlife, the ability of our national forest to filter our air and provide beautiful scenery, bountiful recreation opportunities, and essential wood products.

I have concluded that Alternative I is a well balanced approach to forest health for the next ten to twenty years. I find that forested areas most at risk from potential health

damaging situations are generally allocated to prescriptions that will allow management to prevent problems or to respond with suppression actions should problems occur.

Issue # 10 - Special Areas and Rare Communities: There are a variety of rare communities found on the National Forests in Alabama. Rare communities are assemblages of plants and animals that occupy a small portion of the landscape, but contribute significantly to plant and animal diversity. They generally are characterized by relatively discrete boundaries and occupy a small area in a limited number of occurrences across the landscape. These communities are important to diversity; therefore emphasis is placed on inventory and monitoring, as well as maintenance and restoration of these areas. Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan includes direction for inventorying, identifying, mapping and managing these rare communities. Here again, a balance of is achieved since Alternative I allocates the second highest amount of forest acreage to special area management.

Issue # 11 - Wild and Scenic Rivers: The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 90-542: 16 USC 1271-1287, October 2, 1968) and its amendments provide for the protection of selected rivers and their immediate environments. To be eligible for designation rivers must possess one or more outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values. Designation preserves rivers in free-flowing condition, protects water quality and protects their immediate environments for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

The plan map displays sections of two rivers, the Cahaba and Five Runs that will be managed as eligible for Wild and Scenic river designation.

Issue # 12 - Access/Road Management: The transportation system on the National Forests in Alabama serves a variety of resource management and access needs. The management of the transportation system is based on a set of Road Management Objectives (RMOs) that establish the specific intended purpose, based on management needs, and that contain design, operation and maintenance criteria and standards for each road. The RMOs for the Forest range in purpose from being physically blocked to all traffic awaiting need for entry for various activities on an intermittent basis, to being open year round to public traffic in a standard 4-wheel passenger car. The design, operation and maintenance criteria correspondingly vary according to the range of intended purpose. Appendix D of the Revised Plan describes the five generic RMOs for the Forest. The selected alternative emphasizes providing a transportation system that supplies safe and efficient access for forest users while protecting forest resources.

In addition to the issues above, the following issues were local to Alabama.

Issue #13 - Role of Fire/Air Quality: Prescribed fire is an important ecologically appropriate management tool. Both natural fuels and artificially produced management-activity fuels must be managed over time to meet long-term resource

management objectives. The Revised Plan strives to use fire to restore and maintain fire dependent and associated communities. The use of fire as a management tool is discussed throughout Chapter 3 of the FEIS. Chapter 2 of the Revised Plan contains forest-wide direction for the appropriate use of prescribed fire. Alternative I has the greatest amount management use of fire.

While this use of fire has a low potential to drive counties into National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) non-attainment, we do not conclude that prescribed burning projects are being done without concern for air quality. Current guidelines for individual projects or programs will still be followed. In addition, if a nearby county falls into NAAQS non-attainment, Forest personnel will participate in the effort to resolve the problem.

Issue # 14 - Fixed Communication Sites: The Revised Forest Plan as indicated on the maps, allocates areas for communication sites to provide needed services. The selected alternative balances the need for communication service with other resource needs.

Issue # 15 - Tuskegee National Forest as a Demonstration Forest: Tuskegee National Forest as a Demonstration Forest became an issue very early in the plan revision process. The Interdisciplinary (ID) team explored the issue during alternative development and emphasized Tuskegee as a demonstration Forest in Alternative A. However as the planning process continued the issue became less significant. The development of Alternative I addressed the desire to look at different management strategies for the Tuskegee National Forest, particularly the emphasis on restoration, thereby minimizing the significance of this issue. I chose this Alternative's treatment of this issue because under it the Revised Forest Plan would address the underlying concerns of this issue without the need to designate the Tuskegee Forest as a Demonstration Forest.

Issue # 16 - Bankhead National Forest as a National Recreation Area: During the process of Alternative development this issue was explored. Alternative E was developed to emphasis recreation and addressed many of the concerns of the Bankhead National Forest as a National Recreation Area. Development of Alternative I emphasized recreation and restoration. The selected alternative addresses many of the recreation issues while restoring and maintaining native forest communities without a designation as a National Recreation Area.

Issue # 17 - Red-cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Management Areas: In 1995 the Regional Red-cockaded Woodpecker ROD provided direction to National Forests in the Southern Region with red-cockaded woodpecker populations to establish Habitat Management Areas to recover Red-cockaded Woodpeckers through management. In January of 2003, the Revised Recovery Plan for the Red-cockaded Woodpecker was released. The NFsAL Revised Plan incorporates these two sources to maximize Red-cockaded Woodpecker opportunities within existing NFAL conditions, current political management realities, and Forest Plan land allocation decisions.

Management of red-cockaded woodpecker populations on National Forests in Alabama will follow the RCW EIS Record of Decision and the Revised Recovery Plan as required by the Endangered Species Act, and does not vary by alternative. Habitat Management Areas for red-cockaded woodpeckers have been established on the Talladega, Conecuh, and Oakmulgee National Forests.

Management direction has been incorporated into forest plans through the allocation of acres to a Red cockaded Woodpecker Habitat Management Area Prescription and through forest-wide protections of endangered species. Alternative I, while not allocating the most acres of all of the alternatives to this prescription, achieves a high level of RCW protection and recovery through all incorporated measures. Benefits beyond the RCW prescription include those derived from areas in the following Prescription Allocations: Rare Communities Prescriptions (Coastal Plain Sandhills, Coastal Plain Bogs, Woodlands, savannas and grasslands), Restoration of Longleaf and Shortleaf Ecosystem Prescriptions, and Dispersed Recreation prescriptions where the target recreational activity requires vegetation management aimed at producing open, park-like forest stands.

Issue # 18 - Land Exchange and Land Acquisition: Priority for acquisition or exchange for the National Forest is decided on a case-by-case basis. The best opportunity to improve landownership patterns has been to acquire high priority lands within or adjacent to existing National Forest lands using scattered and or less efficiently managed forest lands for exchange.

The Revised Plan (Alternative I) appropriately provides for land exchange and land acquisition as a site specific, case-by-case decision.

Issue # 19 - Minerals: The use of mineral resources is essential to the local, regional and national economy as well as to the public use, management, and sustainability of the National Forest. Congress has passed various laws providing for the exploration and development of mineral resources, including oil and gas, on National Forest System lands. The National Forests in Alabama under the direction of the Revised Plan has 80,337 acres or 12% of the Forests are 100% private mineral rights, and 42,327 acres or 6 % of the Forests are acres designated as Wilderness and/or Wild & Scenic River, which are withdrawn from any type of mineral development. Of the remaining acres available for oil and gas leasing 356,186 or 65% are available with standard terms, 157,430 or 29% are available with controlled surface use and 29,431 or 5% are available with no surface occupancy.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the “environmentally preferable” alternatives as: “...the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.”

Alternative I is the environmentally preferable alternative. It provides the best balance between the social, economic, physical, and biological environment. In reading the descriptions of Alternatives B and G, it might appear that these alternatives would have fewer negative human-induced changes to the environment than Alternative I. However, Alternatives B and G place an emphasis on using timber harvest to convert off-site pine stands to native pine species. They would both schedule larger amounts of timber harvesting activities than Alternative I, and would create a higher risk of spreading invasive species. Alternative I still provides the benefits of restoration of suitable species composition, and it would schedule the least amount of timber harvest and associated road development, resulting in the least human-induced change to the natural environment. Consequently, of all the alternatives considered in detail, it would have the fewest adverse human-induced effects on the biological and physical environment, while providing a high level of beneficial effects.

Alternatives with Higher Present Net Value

The 1982 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations (36 CFR 219.1) state that forest plans must "...provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner." Net public benefits can be defined as the overall value to the Nation of all outputs (benefits) and positive effects, less all associated inputs (costs) and negative effects, whether they can be quantitatively valued or not. Therefore, public net benefits have 2 components: priced and non-priced benefits and costs.

Priced benefits and costs: Prices for timber outputs and recreation uses were estimated in the FEIS (Chapter 3D). The Present Net Value (PNV) was used to measure the economic efficiency of each alternative. A comparison of the alternatives' PNVs, is shown in Table 3D-26 of the FEIS Chapter 3d. All the alternatives fall within 11 percent of the current (alternative F) PNV. Therefore, in terms of priced benefits and costs, the range is fairly narrow among alternatives.

Non-priced benefits and costs: The range among alternatives becomes much wider when non-priced benefits and costs are considered. Some of the important non-priced benefits include ecosystem diversity; restoring habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species; water quality; and scenic quality. The benefits of balancing the resource flows are non-priced, but real values of society.

I believe that Alternative I provides direction to manage the Forest to produce goods, services, and use opportunities in a way that maximizes net public benefits. Based on the preceding discussions it is clear that Alternative I does not have the least impact on the environment nor does it generate as many market valued commodities as other alternatives considered in the FEIS. However, I believe the Selected Alternative achieves the best balance between the economic benefits and environmental issues and concerns voiced by the public. I believe the Selected Alternative will increase public benefits by moving the Forest towards improved forest health through its emphasis on restoring native landscape diversity and through its special attention to

providing functioning ecosystems and unique plant and animal habitats. I am also confident that the management direction in the Revised Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and can be accomplished without reducing that capability.

C. Changes Between Draft and Final

Review of the released DEIS and Proposed Revised LRMP revealed editorial and other inconsistencies in the presentation of information. Comments on the DEIS and Proposed Revised LRMP also identified the need for several minor improvements to analysis and presentation. Specific changes to Alternative I and the environmental analysis, between Draft and Final, beyond editorial and inconsistency corrections are discussed below.

Streamside management zone direction - The Proposed Revised Plan included references to SMZ direction, however the details including standards were not included. This forest-wide direction has been added to chapter 2 of the Revised LRMP.

Management Prescription 9.G – Chapter 3 of the Proposed Revised Plan detailed the management prescription allocations and direction. Management prescription 9.G was shown on the accompanying maps; however, it was not described in Chapter 3 of the Proposed Revised LRMP. The description including emphasis and desired conditions has been added.

Other minor changes – A few other changes were also made. In Chapter 2 of the Proposed Revised Plan a table displaying old growth was referred to and has now been added to the Revised Plan. The Aquatic section of Chapter 3b, DEIS has been revised for clarity. In Chapter 3b, acreages were added to the tables in the Permanent Openings section. The Migratory Bird section was enhanced with additional narratives and a presentation of fragmentation analysis. The Terrestrial Viability Analysis was updated with minor narrative and new information. MIS information presented was supplemented, and a summary table of MIS objectives was added to Chapter 2 of the Plan. The Errata in the DEIS has been inserted into the proper place in Chapter 3B of the FEIS. Additional information became available for the Air Quality analysis in FEIS Chapter 3A and was incorporated into the analysis.

III. Public Involvement

A recurring theme throughout the comments was that the National Forests in Alabama needed to work more closely with the other national forests in the Southern Appalachians. In January 1994, work on the Southern Appalachian Assessment (SAA) began. Formal inventories of the Forest's natural and environmental resources were done as part of the SAA using many improved scientific methods and data

processing techniques that were unavailable during the development of the 1986 plan. Citizens and scientists from other federal and state agencies reviewed and offered suggestions for improving these inventories.

After the SAA was completed, a joint Notice of Intent (NOI) was issued in the Federal Register August 1, 1996. This new NOI marked not only a new beginning for revising the Alabama Forest Plan, but also included the other four national forests in the Southern Appalachians, embarking us on an unprecedented process of coordination and cooperation.

Beginning with the SAA, more than 20 Southern Appalachian-wide resource team meetings, roughly 20 coordination meetings of the Planning Team Leaders across the Southern Appalachians, and over 60 regularly scheduled Interdisciplinary Team meetings were open to the public. This gave citizens unprecedented access to the planning process. It also provided people the opportunity to share and understand the difficulty and complexity of balancing the multiple resources of the National Forests along with the diverse and frequently conflicting values of citizens interested in this Forest's management.

The National Forests in Alabama hosted many open houses, public meetings, and open ID Team meeting throughout the alternative development process. In 1998, the concept of the "Rolling Alternative" (alternative I) was born. The Forest Service in cooperation with interested communities worked together to find a balance between conflicting interests.

Alternative I became the preferred alternative in the Draft EIS and was released for public comment in February 2003. More than 12,000 letters, emails, and postcards were received as comments on the draft Forest Plans for the five Southern Appalachian forests.

After careful consideration of the comments, the interdisciplinary team made necessary changes as they developed the Final EIS, and Alternative I became the Final Forest plan. A detailed summary of public involvement activities is available in Appendix A of the Final EIS. A list of agencies, organizations and individuals on the distribution list for the FEIS is available in Chapter 5 of the FEIS. A summary of the comments received on the DEIS and the Proposed Revised Plan and responses to those comments is in Appendix J of the FEIS.

IV. Alternatives

Seven alternatives are considered in detail in the FEIS, including Alternative I, the Revised Forest Plan. Two additional alternatives, (FEIS, Chapter 2, Section 2.1) were considered but eliminated from detailed study for reasons given in Chapter 2 of the

FEIS. The management theme for each of the alternatives is provided below. A discussion of the environmental effects for the alternatives considered in detail is included in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

A. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Study

Alternative C

This alternative, that was primarily a custodial (no active management) emphasis, was not developed in detail. The Forests carried Alternative C for a long time and there was a fair amount of analysis done on this alternative.

Alternative C was eliminated from detailed study because: 1) From further analyses it was determined that this alternative, as originally envisioned, would not meet all the legal requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (MUSYA) and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA); 2) Alternative C only addresses some, but not all, of the forest planning issues that have been identified by the public; and 3) Alternative C is similar to the “Minimum Level Benchmark” discussed in Appendix B.

Alternative H

When the management prescriptions applicable to this alternative were allocated and mapped, there ended up being virtually no difference between this alternative and Alternative G. The allocations were essentially the same, and the only significant difference between Alternative G and Alternative H was that in Alternative G, the majority of those acres being managed through silvicultural harvesting methods were classified as acres “suitable for timber production”, while in Alternative H, those same acres and same management activities would be classified as “unsuited for timber production”. Since there would be no differences in the overall outputs and environmental effects, it was decided that this alternative did not need to be considered further in detail in this EIS.

B. Alternatives Considered in Detail

Alternative I – Revised Forest Plan

This alternative emphasizes management of forest ecosystems through restoration and maintenance—which ensures healthy watersheds; provides for sustainable and diverse ecosystems that support viable plant, wildlife, and fish populations; and provides for high quality, nature-based recreation opportunities, especially in non-motorized settings with high quality landscapes. Habitats for those species needing large, contiguous forested landscapes would be maintained or increased. Management actions would be taken where needed to conserve and recover threatened, endangered, sensitive, and locally rare species.

Inventoried roadless and un-roaded areas would be managed to retain their un-roaded character. The inventoried roadless areas adjacent to the existing Cheaha Wilderness Area would be recommended for wilderness. A spectrum of high-quality,

nature-based recreation settings would be provided, and there would be an emphasis on providing those recreation opportunities that are not widely available on non-Federal lands.

All existing inventoried old growth would be protected, and there would be an adequate representation of old-growth patches of those communities found on national forest lands. The health of the forest vegetation would improve by replacing off-site species, thinning overstocked stands, and restoring fire-dependent and fire-associated communities. Some of the best silvicultural sites that are currently accessible could be managed to provide a supply of high-quality sawtimber. Other lands would provide a variety of products as a result of other management activities. The total ten year allowable sale quantity of timber (ASQ) would be 85.3 million cubic feet. Generally, access will be limited to those areas that can be accessed by maintaining or reconstructing existing system roads, or through the construction of temporary roads.

This selected alternative represents the Forest's attempt to balance diverse public interests, diverse wildlife needs, and our stewardship responsibilities as we manage the National Forests in Alabama over the next decade or longer. This alternative is identified in the Final EIS as the alternative that provides the most acceptable resolution to the needed changes in management. It is the alternative that is carried forward to the Revised Forest Plan.

Alternative A

This alternative would emphasize production of goods and services beneficial to local economies and communities. Timber management would provide sustained yield of wood products with emphasis on the high-quality sawtimber. The ten-year total allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for timber for this alternative would be 136.9 million cubic feet. This alternative would also emphasize habitat for wildlife including game and other species. Public access would increase in high-use areas and/or improved to provide for more recreation opportunities.

Alternative B

This alternative would emphasize restoring ecosystems and natural processes and creating and maintaining wildlife habitats. When possible, natural processes would be mimicked in a natural landscape pattern. Wood products would be managed only in concert with restoring and maintaining ecosystems. The ten year allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for timber would be 102.9 million cubic feet.. The long-term goal would be to provide old-growth conditions by old-growth community types within the ecological province or section similar to that existing before pioneer settlement and land uses. Access would be reduced as needed to restore and protect aquatic systems, soils, and plant/animal communities.

Alternative D

The emphasis of this alternative would be to reach and maintain a balanced age class of forest types found in Alabama. This "balance of age classes" would occur on

lands identified as suitable for timber harvest. The ten-year total allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber would be 226.9 million cubic feet. Large- and medium-sized blocks of old growth would be provided only on unsuitable land. Potential for roaded natural experiences would increase as access roads for timber harvest are built or improved. Access would be developed, maintained, and used as needed to meet the goal of balanced age classes, wildlife habitats, and production of timber products.

Alternative E

The emphasis of this alternative would be to reach and maintain a balanced age class of forest types found in Alabama. This “balance of age classes” would occur on lands identified as suitable for timber harvest. The ten-year total allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber would be 226.9 million cubic feet. Large- and medium-sized blocks of old growth would be provided only on unsuitable land. Potential for roaded natural experiences would increase as access roads for timber harvest are built or improved. Access would be developed, maintained, and used as needed to meet the goal of balanced age classes, wildlife habitats, and production of timber products.

Alternative F (No Action)

This is the “No Action Alternative” (Current Management). Management direction would continue under the existing 1986 Forest Plan, as amended. Management activities are designed to improve the age class distribution in all forest types to address the “aging forest” condition and to provide a balanced market and non-market resource program. This alternative increases opportunities for developed and primitive recreation experiences as demand dictates. It provides for an optimum population of game and non-game species and protection of sensitive species. The current Plan’s ten-year allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for timber is 185 million cubic feet (18.5 million cubic feet per year). However, the forest is only implementing approximately 1.5 million cubic feet per year.

Alternative G

Semi-primitive, wildlife, and nature-oriented recreation opportunities would be emphasized. This alternative would emphasize linking together—through land allocations—wildlife-movement corridors and large undisturbed areas, threatened and endangered species, species reintroduction, and watershed restoration. Backcountry, wildlife species using late-successional habitat, and nature-oriented non-motorized recreation opportunities would be emphasized. Most roadless areas would be recommended for wilderness study. Effects of native insects and diseases would be accepted. Road network mileage would be reduced through closure and obliteration of roads not needed for ecosystem stewardship or restoration. The total ten year allowable sale quantity (ASQ) for timber would be 126.1 million cubic feet.

IV. Findings Related to Other Laws and Authorities

I have considered the statutes governing management of the National Forests in Alabama, and I believe that this decision represents the best possible approach to both harmonizing and reconciling the current statutory duties of the Forest Service.

CLEAN AIR STANDARDS

As discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Physical Resources, Air Resources, all lands managed by the Forest are currently in attainment with National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Compliance with air quality statutes is directed in the Forest Plan, Chapter 2, Watersheds: Water, Soil, Air, and Aquatic Species; Chapter 2, Fire Management; and Chapter 2, Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers.

CLEAN WATER ACT

The Revised Forest Plan contains direction to ensure all projects comply with the requirements of the Clean Water Act. A watershed assessment was completed to show the current condition of streams and watersheds on the Forest. The results of this assessment informed direction in the Forest Plan. This direction is found in the Forest Plan, Chapter 2, Watersheds: Water, Soil, Air, and Aquatic Species and Chapter 3, Management Prescription 11: Riparian Corridors. Analysis of sediment yields and cumulative effects for water quality and associated beneficial uses is discussed in the FEIS, Chapter 3, Physical Resources, Water Resources.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

In accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, Forest Plans are not undertakings under the National Historic Preservation Act. Consultation pursuant to Section 106 of the Act is not required at the Forest Plan level. As discussed in the Social/Economic Environment, Heritage Resource section of Chapter 3 of the FEIS, activities in the Revised Forest Plan will be in compliance with the Act. Conformance with the Act is directed in the Revised Forest Plan in Chapter 2, Heritage Resources. Additional direction is provided in FSM 2360.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

This decision is made with the benefit of extensive consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service on the Revised Forest Plan and EIS. The USFWS was a partner in completing species viability assessments and helping develop wildlife habitat objectives. They were provided advanced copies of the Revised Forest Plan, FEIS and the Biological Assessment (BA). Their recommendations were included in the final plan. The BA assessed effects to federally-designated proposed, threatened or

endangered species that occur or could occur on the Forests. The USFWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination of effects in the BA that implementation of Alternative I for the Forest Plan Revision is "not likely to adversely affect" federally-listed endangered or threatened species or their habitats.

Further consultation with USFWS will be part of site-specific evaluations for project-level decisions.

ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE

On January 12, 2001, the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule or RACR) was published in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 294). The Roadless Rule prohibited with certain exceptions, road construction and reconstruction activities; and the timber cutting, sale, or removal activities that could occur in the inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) identified in the Roadless Rule FEIS. The Roadless Rule in 36 CFR 294.12 and 294.13, identified the exceptions where road construction/reconstruction activities and timber cutting/removal activities would be allowed. The Roadless Rule had an effective date of March 13, 2001. This effective date was later delayed until May 12, 2001.

Subsequently, several groups and States filed lawsuits challenging the Roadless Rule. On July 14, 2003, the United States District Court, Wyoming District (Judge Clarence Brimmer) found the Roadless Rule to be in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wilderness Act, and permanently enjoined its implementation and set the rule aside. The effect of this ruling is that direction for inventoried roadless areas reverts to the direction provided in the Revised Forest Plan. However, this issue is not settled. Appeals of the Wyoming District Court decision, other litigation, new rulemaking, or new Forest Service directives could result in a change in direction for the management of inventoried roadless areas.

In managing the roadless areas, the National Forests in Alabama will follow the management direction contained in this Forest Plan and any Forest Service policy on roadless area management specified in the Forest Service directives. However, should the Roadless Rule become effective, it will supercede this Revised Plan for those inventoried roadless areas identified in the Roadless Rule FEIS that was completed in November 2000? This would mean that those areas in the Revised Forest Plan that are identified as available for treatment could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the RACR. According to 36 CFR 294.14(b), should the Roadless Rule become effective, an amendment to this Revised Forest Plan would not be needed to implement its direction.

OTHER FOREST SERVICE DECISIONS WITH MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

Other decisions that apply to the management of the Forest are included in the Records of Decision for the Gypsy Moth EIS, and the Southern Pine Beetle EIS.

V. Implementation

The direction in this Forest Plan will become effective 30 days after the publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Final Environmental Impact Statement in the Federal Register.

Under NFMA, “permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy” of National Forest System lands are required to be “consistent” with the current Land and Resource Management Plan [16 U.S.C. 1604(i)]. In the plan revision context, NFMA specifically qualifies the requirement in three ways: 1) these documents must be revised only “when necessary”, 2) these documents must be revised “as soon as practicable”, and 3) any revisions are “subject to valid existing rights”.

In developing this Revised Plan, implementing pre-existing decisions and the associated effects of that implementation were considered part of the baseline against which the alternatives were evaluated. Because these earlier decisions were considered in our effects analysis, their implementation is not in conflict with the Revised Plan. Exercising my discretion under NFMA, I have determined that it is not “necessary” to apply the Revised Plan’s standards retroactively, and I find that NFMA does not require revision of these pre-existing use and occupancy authorizations. As soon as practicable after approval of the Revised Plan, the Forest Supervisor shall ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Revised Plan. On a case-by-case basis, the Forest Supervisor shall exercise his/her sound discretion in determining when such consistency is practicable. “Use and occupancy” agreements include contracts for timber harvesting. Most timber sale decisions are implemented through a three-year contract. While a timber sale contract is a valid existing right, the terms of the contract allow modification. Therefore, modification of a timber contract under its terms would not violate the “valid existing right” provision. Nevertheless, I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the Revised Forest Plan. As stated earlier, these contracts were considered part of the baseline against which the alternatives were evaluated. Finally, existing timber contracts will generally have been completed within three years. The decision will be left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify any decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract. Other classes of “use and occupancy” agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan.

The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed previously, these activities are site-specific and may require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan. Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and

projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions. All activities, many of which are interdependent, may be affected by annual budgets. However, the goals, objectives, standards, management prescriptions, and monitoring questions described in the Revised Plan may not change unless the Plan is amended.

The Plan will be amended or revised to adjust to changing circumstances. For example, the management goals, objectives, and standards stated may, in the near future, be in need of updating or amendment in order to come in line with later assessments or analyses. The amendment process gives us the flexibility to adapt the decisions made today to the realities of tomorrow. We will provide opportunities to the public to be involved in future changes to the Revised Plan.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The monitoring and evaluation program is the quality-control system for a forest plan. This program is described in Chapter 5, "Monitoring and Evaluation", of the Revised Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation is emphasized in this revision and will provide us with information on the progress that we achieve in obtaining management goals and objectives. This information will be evaluated and used to update inventory data, to improve current and future mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the Revised Forest Plan. Evaluation of monitoring results is directly linked to the decision maker's ability to respond to changing conditions, emerging trends, public concerns, and new information and technology. No single monitoring item or parameter automatically triggers a change in Revised Forest Plan direction. An interdisciplinary approach is used to evaluate information and decide what changes are needed.

Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to Revised Forest Plan goals, desired future conditions, objectives, standards, and specific regulatory requirements. Not every goal, objective, and standard can be monitored. Relevancy to issues, compliance with legal and agency policy, scientific credibility, administrative feasibility, long- and short-term budget considerations, and impact on work force all influence monitoring priorities. A range of acceptable approaches has been identified to monitor and evaluate the forest-wide status and trends of habitats and populations for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species or for those species selected as management indicator species. One or more of these approaches that can be applied in monitoring a species include:

- (1) measurement of habitat conditions and trends for species,
- (2) the use of population occurrence data,
- (3) the use of population indices to track relative population trends,
- (4) actual population estimates and demographic information usually reserved for some federally listed species or high risk globally impaired species, and
- (5) development of research studies to determine species/habitat relationships and species responses to conditions created by land management activities.

Each monitoring question has one or more monitoring items to answer the question. For each monitoring question, a monitoring task sheet has been developed. These task sheets are used to develop the details, priorities, and budgeting for answering the monitoring questions. The task sheets are not part of my decision but are in Appendix L of the Revised Forest Plan for information. Changes to task sheets will not require a Forest Plan amendment.

Public participation is vital as we monitor our progress. We will work with partners and cooperators in developing and carrying out monitoring activities. Activities, findings, and results will be evaluated and reports will be available for the public at least annually. The public may review the results and recommend changes based on monitoring findings, emerging issues or new information.

VII. Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 217. A written appeal of this decision must be filed in duplicate within 90 days of the date of the published legal notices. Appeals must be filed with:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: NFS-EMC Staff (Barbara Timberlake)
Stop Code 1104
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-1104

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR part 217;
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant;
- Identification of the decision to which the appeal is being made;
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which appeal is made
- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Requests to stay implementation of the Revised forest Plan will not be granted [36 CFR 217.10(a)]

Final decisions on proposed projects will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation and in compliance with NEPA. Project

decisions may be subject to appeal at that time.

USDA Forest Service
 Attention: Ecosystem Management Staff (Steve Segovia)
 P.O. Box 96090
 Washington, D.C. 20090-6090
 (202) 205-1066)

For questions concerning the Alabama Revised Forest Plan, contact:

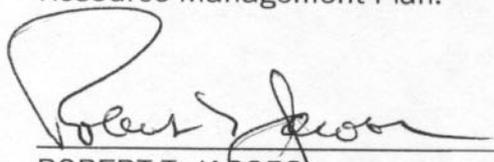
Steve Rickerson
 Forest Supervisor
 National Forests in Alabama
 2466 Chestnut Street
 Montgomery, Alabama 36107

Reviewers are encouraged to contact the Forest Supervisor before submitting appeals to determine if misunderstandings or concerns can be clarified or resolved.

VIII. Approval

I am pleased to announce my decision and bring this phase of forest planning to completion. This Forest Plan has been built on a strong foundation of citizen collaboration and the best available science.

As we move forward we will carefully monitor our activities, the condition of the land, the goods and services produced, and the effectiveness of the resource protection measures included in the Revised Forest Plan. I anticipate that implementation of the plan will be conducted in the same spirit of partnership that has characterized this revision process. Working together we can meet the challenges, realize the opportunities, and achieve the goals and objectives of the Alabama Land and Resource Management Plan.



 ROBERT T. JACOBS
 Regional Forester
 Southern Region, USDA Forest Service

1/15/04

 Date