

ANNUAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION REPORT

National Forests in Alabama

Fiscal Year 2000

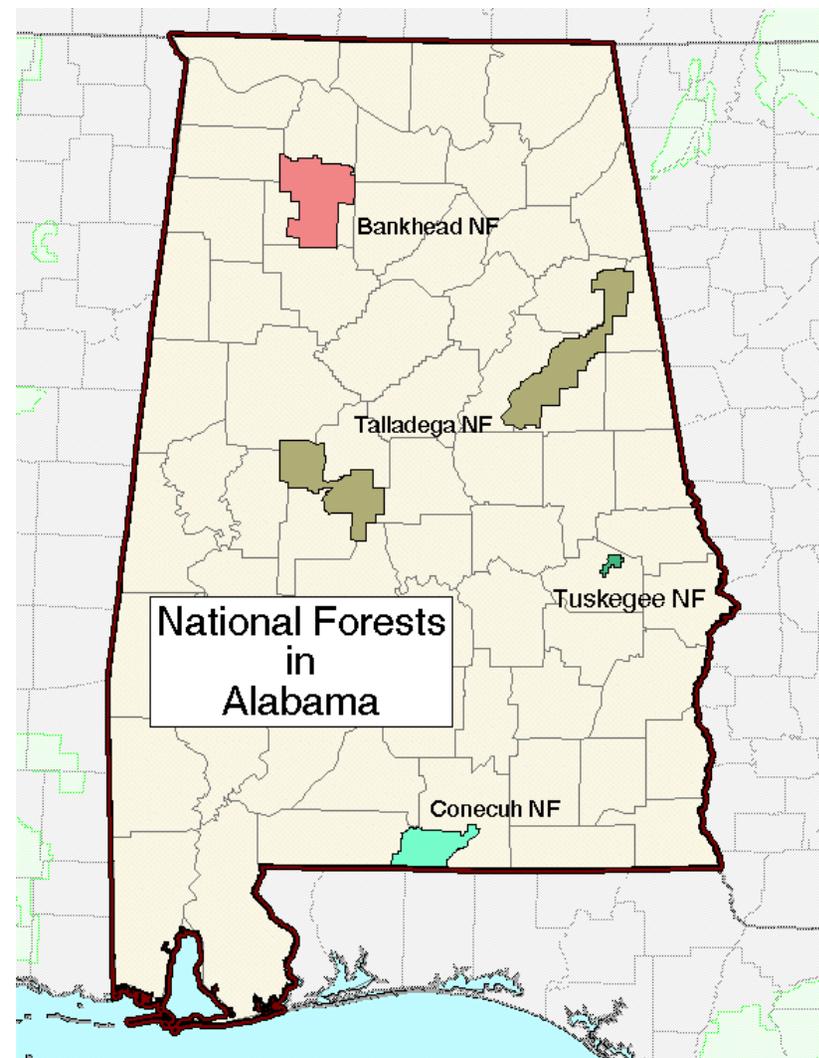


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Certification

I have evaluated the monitoring results and recommendations in this Report. I have directed that the Action Plans developed to respond to these recommendations (See Appendix C) be implemented according to the time frames indicated, unless new information or changed resource conditions warrant otherwise. I have considered funding requirements in the budget necessary to implement these actions.

When all recommended changes to the Forest Plan have been implemented, the Plan will be sufficient unless ongoing monitoring and evaluation identify further need for change.

Any amendments or revisions to the Forest Plan will be made using the appropriate NEPA procedures.

/s/James A. Gooder
JAMES A. GOODER
Forest Supervisor

6/15/01
Date



Executive Summary

This section includes a brief summary of the process used to develop this report and the important findings and results for this year.

The National Forests in Alabama annually monitor and evaluate programs and projects to determine whether these activities are meeting the management direction shown in the Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation are specifically designed to insure:

- (1) Forest Plan goals and objectives (outputs) are being achieved,
- (2) Standards and Guidelines are being properly implemented,
- (3) Environmental effects are occurring as predicted, and
- (4) Our actions are having the expected results,
- (5) New issues are being identified and addressed.

The evaluation of monitoring results allows the Forest Supervisor to initiate action to improve compliance with Standards and Guidelines where needed and determine if any amendments to the Forest Plan are needed to improve resource management. This Annual Report also provides a tool to improve internal communication and feedback, and provides for accountability to the public.

Good progress is being made toward supplying the goods and services (objectives) shown in the Forest Plan. The Forest was able to achieve many objectives by work done through the Older American Program, Volunteers and the Challenge Cost-Share Program. The actual funding received in FY 2000 compared to the Forest Plan budget is shown in Table 5, and again falls below levels needed to fully implement the forest plan.

Evaluation of the monitoring results revealed a vast majority of the Standards and Guidelines were being followed and were effective in maintaining high quality resource management. The results and recommendations for actions to be taken by the Forest Supervisor, by resource activity area are as follows:

1. **Ecosystem Condition, Health and Sustainability** - Overall the condition and health of the ecosystems on the National Forests in Alabama are good. Monitoring indicates that most habitat improvement work is proceeding at or above projected levels. Prescribed burning for RCW and wildlife has occurred at increased levels and the mix of dormant and growing season burning is contributing to the diversity of habitat and herbaceous conditions across the forest. Game species (deer turkey and squirrel) population numbers appear to be stable or increasing, although deer appear to have lower population levels outside the wildlife management area on the Talladega Division than inside. Quail numbers continue to be quite low in the general forest

area, but numbers have increased on the Conecuh NF and around the quail emphasis areas where prescribed burning has occurred more frequently. Red-cockaded woodpeckers continue to have a downward trend on all districts except the Oakmulgee, which is stable, and the Conecuh, which experienced a decline after Hurricane Opal but has increased slightly in recent years. Monitoring for the dusky gopher frog revealed a record number of egg masses in Nellie Pond this year. There were also a large number of egg masses in Salt Pond. This important work with Universities and cooperators is continuing. Air quality standards were met this year. Southern Pine Beetles were epidemic on the Bankhead and Oakmulgee Districts. Chinese Tallow tree and kudzu continue to be a problem in some areas. Littleleaf disease was determined to be the cause of loblolly die-off on the Oakmulgee, Shoal Creek and Talladega districts, and this continues to be a concern. Longleaf restoration on these sites is a recommended treatment. Implementation of the Longleaf Restoration EIS on the Conecuh is a major step towards addressing the off-site slash pine problem on that unit. Water quality standards were met in FY 2000 and site productivity appears to be maintained. The main concern with ecosystem diversity is the increasing lack of early seral stage habitat that is well below the minimum 6% level recommended in the forest plan. Recommendations include the need to increase the emphasis on first thinning in pine stands and increase the number of acres regenerated to meet forest plan goals and objectives, as well as habitat needs. Also, habitat improvement work such as prescribed burning, opening maintenance, nest boxes, seeding closed roads and log landings should be continued and in some cases increased. Continue or increase inventory and monitoring activities for Management Indicator Species (MIS) and Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) species, and get an operational habitat capability model on line to aid in analyzing habitat changes. In FY 2000, we completed an amendment to the Plan to clarify how we collect information on threatened, endangered, and sensitive species (see Appendix B for brief description of Amendment #17). The forest also began working on a report to evaluate information and current status of MIS. This work should continue through FY 2001.

2. **Sustainable Multiple Forest and Range Benefits** - A broad spectrum of recreational opportunities are being offered to the public but funding shortfalls have created a situation with a backlog of reconstruction and maintenance needs and recreation opportunities that are not meeting our current standards. Demo Fee receipts are mitigating some of the funding shortfalls. SCSEP programs continue to provide the major portion of the workforce to maintain our recreation sites. Trail maintenance continues to have a very large backlog of needs even with the substantial contribution from volunteers and partners. Funding was obtained from the 10% Roads and Trails Fund to address the resource concerns on the Bartram Trail. These funds are being used to construct an alternate route along the existing trail for mountain bikers and should be completed in FY 2001. The first phase of a limited reconstruction project at Payne Lake began this FY with hookup to municipal water supply, with the contract phase beginning in FY 2001. Some off trail OHV use is still occurring and use on the Kentucky Trail has increased, creating some maintenance concerns. Road construction has not occurred at the level projected by the plan and re-construction has occurred at a higher level than projected. Two of the three wilderness areas have certain places that are receiving heavy use and some value impairment is occurring along locally popular trails and entrance points. Timber products are being offered at a level below Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) and projected levels. There were no regular sales sold in FY 1999 or 2000, with only

SPB salvage sales being offered. Regeneration acres are well below recommended levels. Increasing emphasis on ecosystem management, management for mixed forest types and reductions in the suitable land classes for timber production, due to Plan Amendments and Revision, are expected to further decrease the levels of regeneration cutting. Demand for grazing has decreased and currently only two of the 20 allotments are being grazed. Our land purchase and land exchanges continue to fall well below Plan levels, and due to increasing environmental concerns, litigation and funding shortfalls, this trend is likely to continue. Heritage resource surveys continued on all districts and work is continuing on the Bankhead Heritage Management Plan. Recommendations include the needs to continue implementing the Meaningful Measures process and Infrastructure, continue to use Fee Demo receipts to mitigate recreation funding shortfalls, use partnerships whenever possible to address maintenance needs, in wilderness areas and the wild and scenic river continue the LAC process to identify and address resource concerns. Additionally, we need to look for opportunities to provide early seral stage habitat and evaluate the need for and amounts of this habitat appropriate for the plan revision process.

3. **Organizational Effectiveness** - There is a very large disparity between the budget needs projected in the Forest Plan and the actual budget for FY 2000, which leads to backlogs of projects and maintenance needs. The actual budget was only 54% of the Forest Plan budget. Due to the Plan Revision process, increased public involvement activities, new policies, and litigation, there are a large number of new and important issues facing the forest. This should continue in the future and will create new challenges and opportunities for the forest. Recommendations are that the forest continue to request funding for needed projects and continue to provide open lines of communication with the public, address the changing conditions, and make necessary adjustments.

Introduction



The purpose of this report is to document the results of the Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation program for FY 2000. The National Forests in Alabama annually monitors and evaluates the programs and projects to determine whether these activities are meeting the management direction in the Forest Plan.

Monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing process that is documented through reviews made by the individual resource specialists, Forest Leadership Team and District Rangers. The information from these reviews, individual inventory reports, reports and information from cooperators and research are compiled into one comprehensive report after the Fiscal Year (FY) is completed. The evaluation and final report are completed by the Forest Interdisciplinary and Leadership Teams.

The monitoring and evaluation report that follows, is presented in three chapters and five Appendices.

Chapter 1 is primarily an introduction and summary of the report findings and recommendations. Chapter 2 is the actual results and findings of the monitoring completed in FY 2000. Chapter 3 is a discussion and evaluation of the findings presented in Chapter 2, and also contains the Action Plan.

Appendix A is the list of Interdisciplinary and Leadership Team members who participated in the preparation and review of this report.

Appendix B is the list of Amendments to the Forest Plan.

Appendix C is the updated Action Plan from FY 1999 showing status of action items. Items not accomplished are so noted and included in the new action plan or reasons listed as to why the action item will not be accomplished.

Appendix D is a summary of the field reviews and other administrative activities completed in FY 2000 in connection with the monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Appendix E is a summary of the significant research findings and a prioritized list of research needs that have been identified for the National Forests in Alabama.

Response Form (for public comments).

MONITORING RESULTS AND FINDINGS

I. ECOSYSTEM HEALTH, CONDITION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Biodiversity

- a. **Vegetation management** – The Forest is in the midst of a dynamic time. Emerging issues, the ongoing plan revision process, litigation cases, and the age of the current plan have led to a shift in priorities and emphasis for management. This changing emphasis includes ecosystem restoration, pest management, and early thinning of pine stands to reduce risk for southern pine beetle (SPB) infestations. Monitoring of first year plantations during 2000, indicates that first year survival rate is about 85%, which is slightly below 1999's rate of 86%. The cause of this reduced survival rate is primarily due to the continued below normal precipitation experienced across the state during the winter and spring months. Sufficient soil moisture during early root development of seedlings is critical, particularly so for containerized seedlings that have 3 1/2 inch roots at planting. Monitoring of three year old plantations, planted in 1998, show an 82% survival rate, which means that stands are regenerated with desirable species and are within prescribed stocking densities.

Southern pine beetle have impacted thousands of acres over the past 3 years. These acres need to be inventoried and work begun to ensure regeneration, especially on the many 5-acre and larger spots.

Vegetation continues to be managed through our prescribed burning program. The mix of dormant and growing season burning is having a positive impact on the fire dependant forest communities, particularly on the Conecuh district.

- b. **Management Indicator Species** – Overall, habitat for MIS is being maintained and improved consistent with Forest Plan objectives for most species requiring mid-to-late successional conditions and many aquatics. However, the lack of early successional conditions may result in the continued decline of some species due to specialization or dependence on early seral stage habitats. Table 1 summarizes the monitoring results for each species or species group.

Table 1

Associated MIS Species	Habitat Type(s)	Population & Habitat Condition/ Trends	Management Considerations
White-tailed deer	Early Forest Stage (any forest type age 0-10) and Mature conifer forest	Deer numbers inside wildlife management areas (WMA) are in line with habitat capacity projected in the Plan. Although early successional habitat has declined on the National Forests in Alabama in the last 15 years, there appears to be an overall increase in the number of deer on the forests. Number of deer seen during annual spotlight surveys from 1987 to present display an increase on all national forests in Alabama.	As “edge” species, populations tend to increase as early successional habitat increases. Provide seasonal closures, utilize silvicultural treatments, openings and prescribed fire to optimize habitat conditions. Coordinate with AL Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division to determine harvest levels and seasonal dates.
Eastern wild turkey	Early Forest Stage (any forest type age 0-10), Mature conifer forest, Mature upland hardwood forest, and Mature bottomland hardwood forest	Long-term trends in number are stable on all national forests in Alabama. Yearly variation in reproduction caused primarily by weather cause some short-term decreases. Statewide populations have shown dramatic increases over the past 30-40 years.	Continue to use prescribed fire and access barriers to provide good nesting and brood rearing habitat.
Gray & Fox squirrel	Mature conifer forest, Mature upland hardwood forest, and Mature bottomland hardwood forest	Squirrel populations vary directly with mast crops, so some year to year variation is expected. Sufficient habitat capability is being maintained on all units since they are primarily associated with mature forest types.	Ensure compliance with Plan standards and guidelines to maintain hard mast producing component on all Forests.
Flatwoods salamander, seepage salamander, gopher tortoise, & dusky gopher frog	Sandhills, Mature conifer forest, and Mature upland hardwood forest	In 1980, flatwoods salamander larvae were reported on the Conecuh, but have not been found since. Little is known about population levels for seepage salamander. Gopher tortoise and dusky gopher frog appear to be responding positively to management activities on the Conecuh.	Stand thinning and growing season burns and longleaf/wiregrass restoration efforts improve the habitat quality for gopher tortoise, flatwoods salamander and dusky gopher frog. Need to determine if seepage salamander is useful as an

Associated MIS Species	Habitat Type(s)	Population & Habitat Condition/ Trends	Management Considerations
			indicator and, if so, how it should be inventoried.
Wood thrush, Hooded warbler & American redstart	Mature upland hardwood forest, and Mature bottomland hardwood forest	Breeding bird survey results are highly variable (between years and units) due to route location (along open roads.) Increased use of Breeding Bird Point counts should help determine trends. Habitat availability should indicate increasing populations but surveys indicate a decrease (slight to dramatic) for wood thrush and increasing, decreasing and stable populations for hooded warbler. There is insufficient information to display trends for American redstart.	Need to continue to track information from various sources and try to verify that the forest type and age class association are the correct species composition and structure for these MIS species. Expanded use of Breeding Bird Point counts should help.
Quail	Early Forest Stage (any forest type age 0-10) and Mature conifer forest	Quail numbers continue to be quite low in the general forest area, however breeding bird survey routes indicate fairly good abundance and low variability, yet declining populations on all Districts except the Conecuh NF. Bobwhite quail harvests (based on hunter success) display a more variable population level. Hunter success tends to display higher numbers of quail on the Shoal Creek and Talladega.	Management on quail emphasis areas and for red-cockaded woodpeckers (use of more open timber stands, midstory reduction and growing season fire) has improved quail habitat, but decreases in regeneration acres and limited use of prescribed fire have reduced open, early successional habitat, suitable for quail.
Eastern bluebird & Northern flicker	Early Forest Stage (any forest type age 0-10) NOTE: They will be present in these habitats only where sufficient numbers of suitable nesting snags have been retained.	Breeding Bird Survey data generally shows a slight upward trend for Northern flicker on the Conecuh NF and the Talladega Division, with a slight downward trend on the Oakmulgee Division and the Tuskegee NF. For the eastern bluebird, a cavity nester that prefers early successional habitat, the upward trends were noted on all units except the Tuskegee.	According to CISC data, suitable habitat overall is declining due to aging of the forest, reduced numbers of suitable cavities and reduced forest regeneration. Creation of open forest stands and recurrent use of prescribed burning will increase and improve the grassy, herbaceous understory necessary for foraging.

Associated MIS Species	Habitat Type(s)	Population & Habitat Condition/ Trends	Management Considerations
Pileated woodpecker	Mature upland hardwood forest, and Mature bottomland hardwood forest	Breeding Bird Survey counts continue to indicate a downward trend on the Bankhead, Talladega/Shoal Creek and Tuskegee Units. However, counts on the Conecuh and Oakmulgee show stable to slightly rising trends.	Projects on each District are monitored for compliance with the standard to retain suitable foraging and nesting habitat. Compliance was very good, but although CISC data may indicate an increase in mature hardwood habitat, it does not indicate cavity availability or open hardwood stand condition.
Broad-winged hawk	Mature upland hardwood forest,	Very few broad-winged hawks have been reported from Breeding Bird Surveys or Breeding Bird Plots over the past few years. These methods are probably not effective for this species. From the limited data available, population trends cannot be estimated.	Cooperation with specialists and researchers is needed to develop habitat modeling and suggested protocol for monitoring methods.
Barred owl	Mature bottomland hardwood forest	Owls are nocturnal, therefore current survey methods are not effective for these species.	Cooperation with specialists and researchers is needed to develop habitat modeling and suggested protocol for monitoring methods.
Eastern screech owl	Mature upland hardwood forest and Mature bottomland hardwood forest	Owls are nocturnal, therefore current survey methods are not effective for these species. However, the screech owl has often been found nesting in wood duck boxes and reports from the wood duck box monitoring program indicate an increase in the percentage of wood duck boxes being used by screech owls, likely due to lack of availability of suitable cavities elsewhere.	Cooperation with specialists and researchers is needed to develop habitat modeling and suggested protocol for monitoring methods.
Yellow-breasted chat & Indigo bunting	Early Forest Stage (any forest type age 0-10)	Breeding Bird Surveys indicate an increase for the Yellow-breasted Chat on all units except the Tuskegee. Breeding Bird Plots indicate similar results except for the Bankhead. Indigo	Continue prescribed burning efforts. Management activities creating early successional habitat will be of benefit.

Associated MIS Species	Habitat Type(s)	Population & Habitat Condition/ Trends	Management Considerations
		Bunting counts indicate a decline in population levels for all units in the 1990s, except the Conecuh, which showed an increase.	
Brown-headed nuthatch & Pine warbler	Mature conifer forest	Breeding Bird Surveys show a general increase in population trends for the brown-headed nuthatch on the Conecuh and Talladega Division, with decreases noted on the Bankhead, Oakmulgee, and Tuskegee. Breeding Bird Surveys indicate an increase in population trends for pine warblers on most units, but a decline on the Bankhead. Both species are often found in RCW colonies, although no formal data has been collected at these sites. Incidental nesting results are reported on all units during RCW nest checks.	Continue prescribed burning and restoration efforts to maintain favorable habitat conditions. Consider developing a reporting method for monitoring species use of RCW cavities.
Kentucky warbler	Mature bottomland hardwood forest	In general, monitoring data indicates that Kentucky warblers are declining on all units on the NFs in Alabama.	Information needs are being assessed.
Swainson's warbler	Cane thickets	The Swainson's warbler has only been observed on the Talladega National Forest, and appears to be increasing on the Oakmulgee division, (from the Breeding Bird Survey data). Since cane thicket habitats are not common, very few of these areas are sampled.	There is a need to establish survey stations in this habitat type to improve current information. Cane thickets are fire dependent communities, emphasis is needed on returning fire to this system for expansion and maintenance. Cane habitat is increasing on the Conecuh in response to the growing season burning program.
Pitcher plants (<i>Sarracenia</i> spp)& Grasspink orchids (<i>Calopogon</i> spp)	Herbaceous bogs of the Conecuh	Both species respond positively to canopy openings and the use of fire as a restoration tool. Ocular estimates of abundance indicate that both species are increasing. Several new	Woody encroachment is a problem in some bogs, but the current use of silvicultural treatments to reduce off-site species and prescribed burning

Associated MIS Species	Habitat Type(s)	Population & Habitat Condition/ Trends	Management Considerations
		bogs have recently been discovered. The pitcher plants are responding well to the methods being used, and have recolonized areas formerly occupied by titi and other woody encroachment. In addition, Calopogon species were again observed in Crawford Bog and Parker Springs bog complex.	regime are satisfactorily maintaining if not restoring many bogs. Most bogs now receive growing season burns as well as dormant season burns, on a rotating basis.
Lentic fishes (pond and lake species such as Bluegill and Large mouth bass)	Lakes and Ponds	Over the last 15 years, most units have stable or slightly upward trends for both species populations, while the Conecuh has a downward trend for both species in pond habitats.	Need to expand current monitoring downstream and determine lake management needs on a case-by-case basis.
Lotic species (native stream fishes)	Streams	Recent data is not available for all species, due to rarity or specific stream habitat needs. Least brook lamprey, rosieside dace, banded sculpin, speckled darter, rock bass, rough shiner, black madtom, southern brook lamprey, sailfin shiner, gulf darter, redeye chub, brown darter, black darter were not found during sampling done in conjunction with researchers and university specialists. Silverstripe shiner seem to show an upward trend. Other fish caught during recent surveys in include the speckled madtom and redeye bass, which also show stable or upward trends. Water quality is being protected and/or maintained through the streamside management zones	Sampling should also be initiated in streams to determine the presence or absence of MIS fish species, especially those with specific habitat needs or that are only known to occupy specific stream sections. Protocol should be developed to optimize data sets, personnel availability, and watershed level results.

- c. **Threatened and Endangered Species** – Table 2 contains current status and recommendations for each of the threatened and endangered species inventoried or monitored on the National Forests in Alabama, during FY 2000. Also included in this table is information on sensitive species that were inventoried or monitored, mainly in cooperation with universities and other cooperators.

Table 2

Species	Current Status	Recommendations
Red-cockaded woodpecker (Endangered)	The RCW population on the Oakmulgee appears variable (114-130), yet stable. Active clusters on the Conecuh have increased from 16 to 18. The Talladega and Shoal Creek population has stabilized at 5 active clusters but reproduction is low and these populations are extremely vulnerable to extirpation. There are no known active RCW cavity tree clusters on the Bankhead NF or Tuskegee NF. Augmentation of two pairs should increase the number of breeding groups on the Conecuh. The Oakmulgee population is managed as a donor population. Excessive midstory has been controlled in all active colony sites on all Districts, however, midstory continues to be a challenge in foraging areas on the Oakmulgee and Talladega/Shoal Creek.	Nesting and foraging area mid-story work, prescribed burning and structural treatments (inserts and restrictors) should continue on all units with active RCW. Augmentation of the Talladega Division and Conecuh population should continue. Installation of artificial cavities should be a high priority on all units except Tuskegee, and Bankhead. Talladega and Conecuh districts should consider improvement of inactive sites and installation of recruitment cavity tree clusters.
Eastern indigo snake (Threatened)	To date, none of the hatchling snakes released on the Conecuh have been recovered as adults. Some snakes released as hatchlings on the nearby Solon Dixon Forestry Education Center have been recovered as adults, but no recent sightings have occurred.	The annual monitoring program near the two release sites on the Conecuh and Solon Dixon Center is no longer needed. The monitoring program was designed to judge the efficiency of the restoration effort made on the Conecuh National Forest in the early part of this decade.
Gopher tortoise (Federally listed, yet Not Listed (NL) in sections of	Gopher Tortoise project (Challenge Cost Share [CSC]) with Auburn University, has been conducted since 1991. Populations appear to be stable or increasing on the Conecuh. FY99 began the second phase where a core area	Continue the cooperative study to determine population trends and response to management practices. Management practices to improve tortoise habitat

Species	Current Status	Recommendations
Alabama containing National Forest lands)	was selected which is paired with other studies throughout the south to look at density, behavior, and viable population size.	should also continue.
American alligator (Threatened)	Due to increasing populations across the southeast, the alligator has been down listed from endangered to threatened. Observations indicate at least stable and possibly increasing numbers on the Conecuh District.	Continue monitoring only to the extent required by the Alligator Control Plan in Open, Buck, and Ditch Ponds and in Blue Lake.
Flattened musk turtle (Threatened)	This species is confined to the streams and rivers of the Warrior Basin in northern Alabama and affects only the Bankhead NF. A cooperative study with Auburn University to determine the food habits of juvenile turtles has been completed. As expected their diets contained a large percentage of aquatic gastropods & insects. The population levels for the flattened musk turtle have been described, through status surveys for 20 years. The authors suggest a possible decline in population levels, although trapping success is highly variable. No surveys were performed in 2000.	Conduct monitoring in cooperation with other interested groups to determine the presence and population trend of this species.
Kral's water-plantain (Threatened)	This plant has only been found along the Sipsey River and Hubbard Creek, in the stream flow on the Bankhead National Forest. It has been listed as Threatened. Plant locations have been identified and mapped and continue to be monitored along the Sipsey River. Also in 1999, two new locations of this plant were found, in a second watershed, along Hubbard Creek. Populations remain stable to slightly increasing (due to the new findings).	Continue monitoring in cooperation with other interested parties and researchers and initiate additional surveys to determine the presence and population trend of this species.
Bald Eagle (Threatened)	No bald eagles were documented on the National Forest in Alabama in 2000.	Cooperate with other agencies efforts to study and protect this species.
Indiana and Gray Bats (Endangered)	In February of 1999, Indiana and gray bats were found in two caves on the Bankhead National Forest. This was the first positive identification and location of these bats on the National Forests in AL. Interim standards were recommended by USF&WL Service, and adopted by the	Continue to implement the interim standards and inventory caves for other locations of the endangered bats. Continue to work with the partners involved in the original find and other

Species	Current Status	Recommendations
	Forest, pending completion of a Biological Evaluation and consultation with USF&WL Service.	interested groups or individuals.
Flatwoods Salamander (Threatened)	This species is found in habitat intermediate in moisture conditions, between slash pone flatwoods with limestone sinkhole depressions and sandhills. The flatwoods salamander has only been found once on the Conecuh by Dr. Mount. A survey report by Bailey and Jensen (1992) identified 2 suitable habitat areas on the Conecuh, but their numerous attempts to locate the salamander have not been successful.	Continue to work cooperatively with other interested parties and researchers to locate flatwoods salamanders.
Blue Shiner (Threatened)	An extensive survey of the upper Choccolocco River drainage in 1999 found no new populations. Blue shiners were observed to be still present in Jones Creek, even though the steam does not have flowing water year round.	Protocol should be developed to optimize data sets, personnel availability, and watershed level results.
Cahaba Shiner (Endangered)	Current information is being evaluated. Most likely this species does not occur on NF lands. There have been no recent surveys of the small section of the Cahaba River within or adjacent to NF lands.	Information needs are being assessed.
Alabama Shad (Proposed)	The Geological Survey of Alabama is currently evaluating the distribution and abundance of Alabama Shad.	Cooperate with other agencies efforts to study and protect this species.
Alabama Sturgeon (Endangered)	The US Fish and Wildlife Service listed the Alabama sturgeon as an endangered species in 2000. The Alabama sturgeon is not likely found within NF lands in Alabama.	Cooperate with other agencies efforts to study and protect this species.
Gulf Sturgeon (Threatened)	Gulf sturgeon were captured by the Alabama Dept. of Conservation in the Yellow River (near Five Runs Creek) on the Conecuh National Forest in 1999. Five Runs Creek (15 kilometers) was later surveyed but no Gulf sturgeon were found.	Continue to work cooperatively with other interested parties and researchers to locate Gulf sturgeon.
Mussels (11 species)	Mussel surveys for select streams on the Bankhead NF were conducted through a Challenge Cost Share agreement	Continue to work cooperatively with other interested parties and researchers to

Species	Current Status	Recommendations
	with the AL Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources in FY1999 and early FY2000. All four listed species (and 14 of 15 known native mussels) occurring on the Bankhead NF were located alive at one or more of 12 study sites. Surveys on the Talladega Division were completed in FY 2000 but the final report from the Southern Research Station has not been received as of this date.	locate and monitor mussel populations.
Aquatic Snails – Lacy Elimia (Threatened) Tulotoma (Endangered) Painted Rocksnail (Threatened)	These species are known to occur in close proximity, but not on National Forest lands.	Continue to work cooperatively with other interested parties and researchers to locate snail populations on National Forest lands.
Alabama Streak-sorus fern (Threatened)	This plant has only been found along the Sipsey River, in the cliffside communities along the canyon walls on the Bankhead National Forest. With cooperative studies, the plant locations have been identified, mapped and continue to be monitored through the 2000 field season. Populations remain stable for 2000.	Continue monitoring in cooperation with other interested groups to determine the presence and population trend of this species. Conduct biological evaluations on project level activities to ensure that guidelines are being followed and continue informal consultation. Establish canyon management zones to protect this habitat.
Alabama Canebrake (Endangered)	No surveys were conducted for Alabama canebrake in 2000.	Conduct monitoring in cooperation with other interested groups to determine the presence and population trend of this species.
Dusky gopher frog (Sensitive)	Dusky gopher frog headstart project (CCS with University of Montevallo) - egg mass was collected and young DGFs were raised both in the laboratory and in cages in Nellie Pond to compare growth. Monitoring at Salt, Nellie, and other ponds found over 160 egg masses in Salt Pond and over 150 egg masses in Nellie Pond. A combination of the Headstart project and fish removal account for the increase	Continue coop study to monitor breeding activity, augment existing populations, and improve habitat for the dusky gopher frog. Continue their excellent habitat improvement program and attempt to establish dusky gopher frog populations at other ponds.

Species	Current Status	Recommendations
	of single-digit numbers of egg masses found in the early 1990s to record numbers now. Dusky gopher frog expansion project involves headstarting young metamorphs into vacant ponds and translocating egg masses into other vacant ponds. So far the headstarting has not been successful due to dry pond conditions. We do not have enough time behind us to measure success on the egg translocation.	
Holiday Darter (Sensitive)	Shoal Creek on Talladega NF was surveyed through a Challenge Cost Share with Auburn University in 2000. From this survey, it appears that the Alabama form of the Holiday darter is restricted to approximately 3.5 miles of Shoal Creek proper.	Cooperate with other agencies efforts to study and protect this species.
Blueface Darter (In process of being described and possibly listed)	The blueface darter has an extremely limited range in the Bear Creek and Hubbard Creek systems, part of which are located on the Bankhead NF. Through a current Challenge Cost Share with the University of Alabama, Hubbard Creek and upper Bear Creek were surveyed in FY2000 and the blueface darter is in the process of being described and likely will receive protection.	Cooperate with other agencies efforts to study and protect this species.

Forest Health

- a. **Air Quality - Clean Air Act designated Class I Areas.** Inventory and monitoring of air quality related values at Sipsey Wilderness continues. The level of vegetation injury at Sipsey (and other Region 8 Class I areas) from tropospheric ozone has been documented. This and other information has been used to influence the revision of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone.

During FY 2000, the Forest received an opportunity from a partner to have several small watersheds in the Sipsey modeled for long-term response to acid deposition. The data package needed to take advantage of this opportunity included soil chemistry

and some water chemistry inventory that had not been funded. The bare minimum of needed data was gathered by revising priorities and then forwarded to the partner.

Visibility at Sipsey Wilderness is being impaired by regional haze. Inventory & Monitoring efforts have not yet revealed a trend toward improvement or deterioration. The Forest needs to continue to focus monitoring efforts on visibility and the effects of acid deposition. Funding is still needed for acid deposition monitoring.

Ambient air monitoring information. The National Forests in Alabama lie entirely outside of any areas designated as “non-attainment” regarding the NAAQS. Jefferson and Shelby Counties, the two most populous counties surrounding Birmingham, have been designated as non-attainment for ozone. Portions of the Forest lie 1 county east and 1 county southwest of this non-attainment area, however. Exceedances of the ozone standard are uncommon within the State of Alabama, except for these 2 counties.

There are approximately 44 sites within the State at which airborne particulates have been monitored for the NAAQS-PM10 standard over the last 6 years. Twenty-eight (28) sites were monitored in CY2000. Among the 224 monitor-years of record obtained within these 6 years, exceedances of the particulate matter standard (NAAQS-PM10) occurred only 4 times, all in Mobile County. With the exception of Mobile and Birmingham, PM10 concentrations throughout the State seldom measure more than half of the amount needed for exceedance of the standard.

Just before this writing, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling that cleared the path for implementation of EPA’s new NAAQS-PM2.5 standard. This standard focuses on respirable particulates, the portion of airborne particulates having a diameter of 2.5 microns or less, and has now become pertinent to Forest management. Much of the aerosol emissions from prescribed and wild forest fire fall into that size range. There are approximately 21 sites within the State at which airborne particulates have been monitored for the NAAQS-PM2.5 standard during CY’s 1999 and 2000. If the trends observed in the reported data continue, most monitored counties in Alabama will fall into non-attainment of the new standard.

The previous discussion of ambient air monitoring is based on data collected by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and maintained by the US EPA in the Aerometric Information and Retrieval Service database (website = “www.epa.gov/air/data”).

Air polluting emissions from Forest Service activities. Prescribed burning is a FS management activity that can emit significant amounts of air pollutants, primarily in the form of PM10 and PM2.5. Statewide monitoring data has been discussed above. While forest fire emissions are striking, they’re not among the major sources of particulate emissions throughout the

State. Nevertheless, the Forest needs to become prepared for participation in the State's planning processes that will be required to bring non-attaining counties back into NAAQS attainment.

Prescribed burning on the Forest decreased by 33.5% from FY 1999 to FY 2000, yielding a corresponding decrease in emissions. The decrease in prescribed burning was due to drought conditions during most of the year. The Forest needs to resume scheduling Forest-wide quality reviews to assure adequacy of the smoke management process.

- b. **Pest Management** - In 2000, Southern Pine Beetles were again very active on the Bankhead, Talladega and Tuskegee National Forests. Epidemic populations occurred on the Bankhead and Oakmulgee districts with a combined total of 1235 infestation sites being identified. Of those, 697 sites are being monitored and 342 sites were controlled through cut and leave or cut and remove control measures. The total area impacted by SPB was about 15,200 acres. Shoal Creek, Talladega and Tuskegee districts had endemic populations, 479 infestation sites (compared to 162 in 1999) were identified with control actions taken on 101 sites.

The threatened and endangered Indiana Bat continues to impact SPB control efforts. The sheer number of spots, size of spots, and extremely poor markets for pulpwood significantly impacted control efforts. The lack of sufficient contractors and crews were a problem that required prioritizing sites for treatments. Many sites that would normally have been treated were left untreated and are being monitored. A high percentage of these sites will likely become active during the summer of 2001 and will require control treatments. This will increase over wintering beetle populations that will add to next year's predicted epidemic populations on the Bankhead, Oakmulgee, Talladega, Shoal Creek, and Tuskegee districts.

Chinese Tallow tree is continuing to be a problem in one area of the Conecuh, and kudzu is found to be encroaching from National Forest lands onto private lands in several small areas.

The Oakmulgee district has approximately 40,000 acres of planted loblolly pine stands growing on sites that previously supported longleaf pines. Approximately 20,000 acres are in the 40 to 70 year age classes. As stands approach the 40-50 year age class they exhibit symptoms of decline and dieback. Significant mortality starts occurring as the stands approach and enters the 50-60 year age class. The cause of this decline, dieback and mortality was isolated and identified by USFS Forest Health Pathologists to be Littleleaf disease (*Pythium* spp.). This disease is a soil fungus that attacks the feeder root of older loblolly and shortleaf pine trees that are growing in eroded soils with poor drainage. Affected trees eventually die from the disease or from SPB to which the trees have become more susceptible. This disease has also been found on the Talladega and Shoal Creek districts and is starting to impact older loblolly stands.

The Forest needs to continue to take prompt and aggressive actions in detection and suppression of SPB and other insect, disease or noxious weed problems. Use herbicides to control the spread of Chinese Tallow tree on the Conecuh, and kudzu elsewhere. Concerning the loblolly die-off problem, Forest Health Unit treatment recommendations, developed by Plant Pathologist Nolan Hess, should be followed. They include fertilization of younger loblolly stands lessen stresses of the disease and accelerated removal of the 40 to 70 year old loblolly stands followed by the planting of longleaf pines which are resistant to the Littleleaf disease. (These recommendations are on file at the Oakmulgee district office.)

Watershed Conditions

Monitoring selected management practices (burning, timber harvest, etc.) includes a determination of the effectiveness of standards and guidelines in protecting site productivity. An extensive review of Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) suppression tactics was accomplished on the Bankhead and Talladega National Forests. Review concentrated on monitoring applications of streamside management zone (SMZs) standards and guidelines for SPB and impacts to (SMZs). SPB infected pine were either removed or cut and left within SMZs where control of spread was expected. There were instances where SPB infected pine were left within SMZs. Monitoring found this tactic to be approximately 50% successful. The severe summer drought made it possible to operate equipment within SMZs with little to no effect on soil and water quality. Monitoring also found weaknesses in communication and documentation of treatments within SMZs. This is currently being addressed in preparation for a repeat SPB infestation. Approximately 25 miles of fire lines were reviewed on the Talladega Division with input for design improvement. Approximately 5 miles of ORV trail was reviewed with input for maintenance improvement.

A total of 6,000 acres of soils were inventoried on the Oakmulgee Ranger District. In addition, 8,000 acres of soils were inventoried on the Conecuh, Shoal Creek, Talladega, and Tuskegee Ranger Districts thru GIS map updates of land acquisitions from past years. To date, a total of approximately 76,600 acres out of 155,400 acres on the Oakmulgee Ranger District have been inventoried. Soil inventory evaluation within the Sipsey Wilderness, including soil sampling and analysis, was accomplished as part of the air inventory for calculating the soil buffering capacity in response to acid rain deposition. Soil inventory updates will assist with the decision process for resource management, specifically forest health and longleaf ecosystem restoration as well as watershed health by supplying updated and more detailed soil data on the Oakmulgee Ranger District than the previous soil inventory. Soil collection and data support continues to be provided to Forest Health as they continue researching the causes for Loblolly decline/die off on the Talladega National Forest. In FY 2000, soil investigations for Forest Health concentrated on the Talladega and Shoal Creek Ranger Districts.

Information from the Sipsey water monitor site managed by the United States Geological Survey indicate waters flowing within that portion of the Bankhead National Forest meets State and Federal standards. Monitoring of macro and micro invertebrates on the Shoal Creek Ranger District, under a challenge cost share study with Auburn University, continued for the 7th and final year with great success. Water quality indication is good reflected in “bug” populations. One aspect of a cooperative agreement with the National Wetlands Research Center is monitoring water quantity from wells established within 5 bog sites on the Conecuh National Forest in FY 1999. Data for FY 2000 is limited due to drought conditions. Monitoring is expected to continue for five or more years. Forest Water quality monitoring data across the forest is limited. Data that has been collected assists the decision process. Additional data is needed to further assist with watershed analysis and ecosystem management.

Water resource inventory in FY 2000 continued concentrating on entering the stream coverage into GIS. A detailed watershed analysis report was developed for 5th level watersheds containing National Forest lands. Information from this report, as well as other water data, will assist the land management planning process and the project decision process as it relates to the watershed health and forest ecosystem management. During FY 2001, the forest interdisciplinary team will determine how this information will be incorporated into the plan revision process and work with district personnel to ensure that they understand the information available and begin incorporating it into their project level decision-making processes.

The forest needs to continue to seek opportunities to establish water quality monitoring in cooperation with universities, state and federal agencies, and private citizens. Continue to update and enter stream data into a GIS format. This will further assist managers with interpretation of watershed health and ecosystem management. In addition, implementing watershed improvement projects improves riparian, soil and water quality, and stream bank stability. Restoration of abandoned non-system roads on the Oakmulgee and Talladega Ranger Districts improves watershed health, improves aquatic ecosystem and aquatic T&E species.

II SUSTAINABLE MULTIPLE FOREST AND RANGE BENEFITS

Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

A wide array of recreation opportunities are available on the National Forests in Alabama, including: backcountry or remote experiences; dispersed recreation opportunities such as hiking, hunting, fishing, and viewing scenery; and developed recreation opportunities at campgrounds, shooting ranges, and picnic areas. However, due to inadequate funding in previous years, some of

these opportunities do not meet current standards. Fee Demo receipts are mitigating budget shortfalls, but there is still a backlog of needs. Reconstruction of Corinth, Coleman Lake, Brushy Lake and Open Pond have helped mitigate these conditions, as have construction of new trails and reconstruction of existing trails in the Bankhead Trails Project. Payne Lake Recreation Area reconstruction should enter the construction phase in FY 2001. The first phase of this project, with hookup to the municipal water supply, was completed in FY 1998, project planning continued in FY 2000. The waterline rehabilitation at Houston Recreation Area is ongoing. While contributions from volunteers and partners is substantial, trail operation and maintenance funding continues to be inadequate, resulting in a maintenance backlog. Maintenance funding has stabilized for FY 2000, but is not secure. Trail bridges were inspected in FY 2000 and found to be in good shape. Fee Demo receipts are being used to offset some of the decline in maintenance funding, and budget allocation criteria shifted some additional funding to trail maintenance. Law enforcement efforts are stretched to the limit so trail use regulations often go un-enforced. In some cases, this is leading to trail maintenance problems and / or resource damage off trails. All trail construction funding in FY 2000 was used to reconstruct existing trails. Funding for Shoal Creek horse trail project has resulted in completion of a draft EA; public involvement is continuing. Monitoring is continuing to identify and mitigate horse trail use impacts in TES drainages. No other impacts were identified during monitoring. Most of the hiking trails have restrictions for mountain bikes. Problems occur because most hiking trails were not located, designed or constructed to accommodate mountain bikes. Funding was obtained through the 10% Roads and Trails Fund to provide mountain bikes an alternate route along the Bartram Trail, which should be completed in FY 2001. SCSEP programs continue to provide the major portion of the workforce to meet recreation maintenance needs.

Off-road use is adequately monitored on designed trails. Some off-trail use is still occurring. Current maintenance of trail system is protecting the land and other resources and maintaining public safety. However, use is increasing, placing the adequacy of current maintenance resources in doubt. Occurrence of inappropriate use and user conflicts is decreasing, and the new loop constructed at Kentuck was constructed to accommodate increased use. Kentuck ORV trail system was maintained/reconstructed in partnership with volunteers and partners. Flint Creek and Kentuck trail systems are monitored to catch off-trail use before it becomes a significant problem and involve law enforcement personnel as appropriate. Districts use Fee Demo receipts to accomplish trail maintenance and improvement. The Flint Creek Multiple Use Trail continues to disperse regional use patterns and take pressure off Kentuck ORV Area.

Encourage partnerships through volunteers, Challenge Cost-Share Agreements and concession resources. Maximize use of partners and volunteers to increase level of trail maintenance accomplished. Fully implement Meaningful Measures and Infrastructure as budgeting and priority setting processes. Continue to plan and expend Fee Demo receipts to mitigate maintenance shortfalls. Consider closing recreation areas and shortening seasons as needed, to operate within funding. Continue to restrict mountain bike and stock use on trails that were located and designed for hiking.

Customer Satisfaction - A review of the comment cards and emails received during FY 2000, indicates that most of the forest users are pleased with the services and facilities they encountered on their visits. Several people made suggestions or comments such as: “some closed roads need to be improved & reopened...”, “I don’t believe it is fair to have to pay to use the wilderness or forest (other than kept campgrounds...)”, “Need more trails for horses...”, “... prompt, polite and helpful...”. Specific requests for information or questions were answered promptly. Repairs at sites were made in response to comments, fixing the water pump at the horse camp, were accomplished as appropriate.

Scenery - Overall current Plan visual quality objectives are being met; however, some project implementation has resulted in public perception of a reduction of visual quality. Need to implement the new Scenery Management System and train forest personnel in its use. Integrate visual quality analysis by the Forest Landscape Architect into all proposed activity planning in visually sensitive viewsheds. Currently on the forest, there are no known areas in need of rehabilitation for scenery. The continuing SPB problems are impacting visual resources by increasing the number of dead trees in concentrated areas and the number of small openings visible.

Infrastructure

Condition/status of facilities – No new facilities were constructed on the forest in FY 2000, but several repair and maintenance projects were completed. Contract administration was completed for the renovations on the restroom and front entrance at the forest research station located at Auburn University. A new HVAC system was installed at the Open Pond work center office on the Conecuh ranger district. A design was completed for replacement of the front and rear wood decks and walkway at the Tuskegee ranger office. Approximately 65% of all buildings located on the forest were inspected for maintenance needs for infrastructure reporting. General maintenance was accomplished on quarters and many other buildings.

Condition/status of roads – Approximately 11.3% (219 miles) of the total miles of road on the forest were maintained to road management objective this year. Approximately 30.6% (597 miles) were maintained to below standard. Three miles of road were reconditioned on the Bankhead and Talladega Ranger Districts. There were a total of 32 miles of road decommissioned, 7 miles of classified road and 25 miles of unclassified roads. The bridge on Thompson Creek (208WEST-3.9) was cleaned and painted. All of the bridges on the forest were inspected and rated.



After cleaning and painting (during deck replacement)



Prior to work (notice peeling paint)

Human Influences

The National Forests in Alabama have a very broken ownership pattern, meaning that there are many private lands dispersed throughout the forest. Many of these private lands have been subdivided, either through inheritance or sale, and there are an increasing number of homes being built near the national forest. This broken ownership pattern leads to concerns and conflicts as more people move into the forest area. Prescribed burning, smoke management, and boundary disputes are probably the largest concerns. The City of Heflin has also raised a water issue because their primary water impoundment facilities are very old and they recognize that they will need to plan for the future, note that Heflin is in Cleburne County which is one of the counties listed on the table below, with a very high population increase. This growth is expected to continue and the current impound, which is also reported to be filling with silt, will not meet the future needs of Heflin and the county. The Shoal Creek district does contain several PL 566 lakes that could meet at least part of their future needs. Cooperation and communication with city water board is ongoing.

Table 3

National Forest/ District	County	% Population Change - 1990 to 2000*
Bankhead	Lawrence	10.4
	Winston	12.7
Conecuh	Covington	3.2
	Escambia	8.2
Talladega/Oakmulgee	Tuscaloosa	9.5
	Hale	10.9
	Bibb	25.6
	Perry	-7.0
	Chilton	22.0
Talladega/Talladega & Shoal Creek	Dallas	-3.7
	Cherokee	22.7
	Calhoun	-3.3
	Cleburne	10.9
	Clay	7.6
Tuskegee	Talladega	8.4
	Macon	-3.3
State of Alabama	All Counties	10.1

* From US Census Data, (from 2000 census)

Largest increase in population occurred in Bibb and Chilton Counties on the Oakmulgee District and Cherokee County on the Shoal Creek District. Cleburne, Hale, Lawrence and Winston Counties also show growth at a rate higher than the state average.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness/Wild& Scenic Rivers

Overall use in Sipsey and Cheaha Wildernesses conforms to wilderness values. However, specific areas of both Wildernesses are receiving overuse and some value impairment is occurring along locally popular trails. All 32,247 acres were managed in

accordance with established law and policy, to the extent of budgeting. Revised wilderness Implementation Schedules continue to be executed partially each FY. Overuse is continuing on the existing trail system. Most boundaries are up to standard. Both wildernesses have part-time wilderness rangers to promote education, protection, monitoring and site management. In April of 2000 a dedication ceremony was held for the new Dugger Mountain Wilderness Area. Accomplishments for this wilderness area in FY 2000 included beginning to post the boundaries, survey of the access road into the private tract and continued work on the final, official wilderness map. The River implementation Schedule (1992) provides specific direction for Wild and Scenic River management. Direction was followed and Sipsey Wild and Scenic River is protected in accordance with Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and policy. The nine-step process for Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) was initiated, with public comment and participation. Continue LAC process for the Wild and Scenic River and the wilderness areas to deal with trail overuse and camping impacts. Continue Bankhead Trail Project, which will construct additional wilderness trails to disperse use. Following is a listing of the roadless areas, wilderness areas, and wild and scenic rivers on the National Forests in Alabama.

Table 4

Name	District	Acres
Sipsey Wilderness Area	Bankhead	25,002
Sipsey Fork Wild and Scenic River	Bankhead	4,737
Cheaha Wilderness	Talladega	7,245
Dugger Mountain Wilderness Area	Shoal Creek	9,200
Blue Mountain Roadless Area	Shoal Creek	4,797
Cheaha Addition A Roadless Area	Talladega	230
Cheaha Addition B Roadless Area	Talladega	715
Reed Brake Roadless Area	Oakmulgee	620

Timber

Since the implementation of the Forest Plan, the number of acres of regeneration harvesting has steadily declined. Many factors contributed to that decline. The major contributors include: Forest Service policies concerning clearcutting, sustainable ecosystem

management, and de-emphasis of timber commodity production; foraging and nesting habitat requirements for RCW; litigation; court decisions; and collaborative negotiations with potential appellants.

With the exception of a salvage program, the N.F. in Alabama did not have a timber sale program in FY 1999 or 2000. This was due to a court ruling concerning management indicator species that placed pending NEPA decisions in jeopardy. During FY 1997, FY 1998, FY 1999 and FY 2000, the forest sold 35,431,000, 22,894,300, 5,599,000 and 9,059,000 board feet, respectively.

The future of regeneration harvesting in the pine and pine/hardwood forest types is expected to increase with the implementation of longleaf restoration programs which will replace off-site loblolly and slash pine stands with longleaf pine. In FY 1999, the Conecuh N.F. completed an EIS to restore longleaf pine on about 4,000 acres of off-site slash pine stands. Implementation was to have begun in FY 2000. The opportunity for longleaf restoration on off-site loblolly stands on the Oakmulgee, Shoal Creek, Talladega, and Tuskegee districts is being studied. The Bankhead National Forest also began a study to address the forest health issues related to off-site species and the need for restoration activities. These forest health and restoration studies will continue throughout 2001.

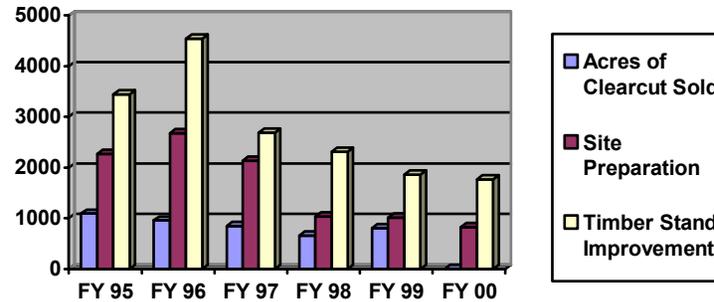
During FY 2000, 10,564 acres of silvicultural examinations and prescriptions were completed. This is less than the 62,200 acres that should be examined annually to complete inventories and prescriptions in compartments on a ten years cycle. Staffing reductions, increased depth of analysis in environmental assessments, appeals and litigation are affecting accomplishments. Issues of southern pine beetle (SPB), loblolly die-off, first thinnings and longleaf restoration are changing the timing of scheduled entries into compartments.

Silvicultural practices implemented through NEPA decision do comply with the Forest Plan. However, with downsizing and budget reductions, the linkage (monitoring and documentation) between NEPA decisions, implementation, and implementation changes were found to be lacking in some situations, during over-site reviews conducted in FY 1999 and FY 2000. It was found that though the deviations may have been very appropriate and needed, there was not adequate documentation addressing what the changes were, why they were needed, or that the changes would not change or create new issues, change the effects analysis and that they were within the scope of the decisions made. Through these reviews, a process was initiated and is now in place to correct these deficiencies, and prevent reoccurrences in the future.

The forest needs to continue over-site reviews. The need to strengthen the links between the NEPA decisions, its implementation and implementation changes back to the NEPA decision is being stressed and will continue to be monitored.

Figure 1 displays some of the trends in timber related activities over the past five years.

Figure 1



Forage

Desired forage production objectives are being achieved. Demand for grazing has decreased and only 2 out of 20 allotments are being grazed. Because of this reduced demand, two grazing allotments are not analyzed each year. All grazing use complies with Standards and Guidelines in the Plan. All grazing has been carried out in compliance with provisions of the existing Term Grazing Permits. New NEPA requirements have been implemented for issuing grazing permits. The Forest Plan was amended (Amendment # 13) to reduce the number of range allotments analyzed per year. Reduction of allotment size is being considered under FLMP revision.

Both active allotments had approximately 1200 acres surveyed, received surveys for herbaceous production and monitoring of rare plants and/or habitats for 2000. Additionally, 3,000 acres were scheduled for range prescribed burning in FY 2000, with 1400 acres actually burned. It should be noted that some of this area does receive prescribed burning on a landscape scale for fuel reduction, restoration and maintenance needs, therefore the level of prescribed burning is appropriate for the current use level.

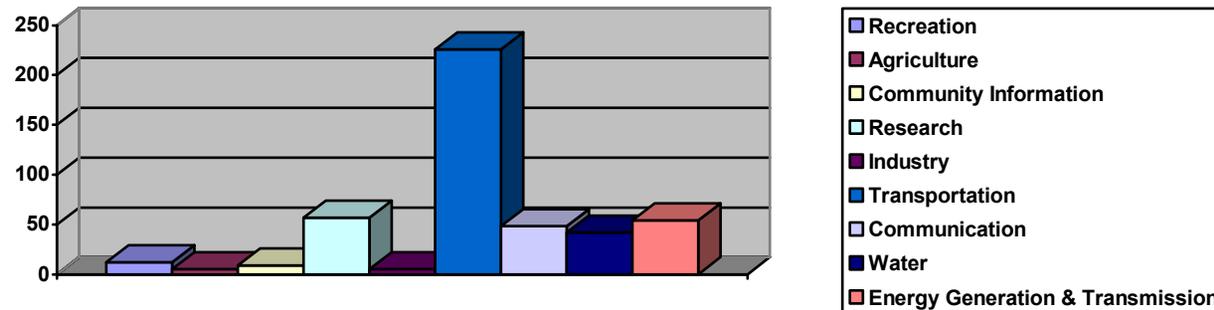
Other Products

Mineral Leases and Permits – Currently 211 leases and permits are being administered on the Forest. This number is almost a 20% decrease from FY 1999. This is a program that responds to requests from the public, and the number administered each

year is controlled by the number of requested received. The forest needs to continue to respond to these requests in a timely manner.

Land Purchase & Land Exchange – In FY 2000, eighty acres were purchased on the Shoal Creek Ranger District. Two land exchanges were completed in FY 2000, both of which involved lands on the Bankhead and Shoal Creek Ranger Districts. A total of 510 acres of land were acquired in exchange for 178 acres of federal land. The Forest needs to continue to purchase land when funds become available and complete land exchanges as proposals are presented to and evaluated by the Forest.

Special Uses – The majority of Special Use Permits field inspected were in compliance with permit stipulations. Special Use inspections carried out by Districts indicate little or no deviation from permit stipulations. Those few situations where stipulations were not being fully complied with were handled through administrative corrections. For FY 2000, there were a total of 458 permits, this is an increase of 9 over FY 1999. The following figure displays current special uses by type.



Heritage

In FY 2000, a total of 4,321 acres were surveyed on the six districts. Sites considered eligible or potentially eligible to the National Register of Historic Places were avoided and protected during land management activities. The liaison with the Alabama SHPO, a Challenge Cost Share Agreement, was concluded. Determinations of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places were submitted for the Kinlock and Indian Tomb Hollow Historic Districts. The Bankhead Heritage Management Plan was worked on through out the year.

III ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Economics

There is a very large disparity between the budget projected in the Forest Plan and the actual budget for FY 2000, which leads to backlogs of projects and maintenance needs. The actual budget is only 54% of the Forest Plan budget.

Table 5 - ACTUAL FOREST BUDGET COMPARED TO FOREST PLAN BUDGET

FY 2000		
Activity	Actual Budget	Forest Plan Budget
Engineering	1,249,000	3,183,000
Fire	1,531,000	1,344,000
General Administration	960,000	2,606,000
Lands	285,000	959,000
Law Enforcement	49,000	312,000
Mineral	90,000	244,000
Planning	550,000	236,000
Range	51,000	118,000
Recreation	1,179,000	2,170,000
Soil, Water, Air	125,000	539,000
Timber	4,380,000	6,885,000
Wilderness	118,000	204,000
Wildlife	598,000	2,234,000
TOTAL	\$11,165,000	\$20,682,000

The budget shortfalls also impact our ability to adequately manage the forest through vacancies that we have not been able to fill, and in the future we may not be able to continue some of our Challenge Cost Share Agreements. At the end of FY 2000, there were several vacancies that could not be filled, and if the budgets continue to decline, this number will increase.

Due to the Plan Revision process, increased public involvement activities, new policies, and litigation, there are a large number of new and important issues facing the forest. This trend should continue and will create new challenges and opportunities for the forest. Recommendations are that the forest continue to request funding for needed projects and continue to provide open lines of communication with the public, address the changing conditions, and make necessary adjustments

Evaluating New Information

Following is a list of the most current issues, concerns and opportunities for the National Forests in Alabama:

- Plan Revision – In April and May of 2000, the ID Team held meetings that were open to the public as part of the watershed analysis process. The information from these meetings will be used to describe the existing conditions and desired future conditions for each watershed on the NFs in Alabama. During the summer and fall of 2000, the revision process was halted due to budget constraints and in anticipation of new rules being issued for Roadless areas, Roads Policy, and new NFMA regulations.
- Horse Trails and Horseback Riding - Horse trails and horseback riding is an activity of intensive use with some controversy centered on connector trails to private property and requests for long term special use permits for horse trails and support facilities. The 10% Roads & Trails Funds have given the Forest Service an opportunity to plan and implement relocation of the majority of the Shoal Creek horse trail system over the next 5 years. The primary need for the relocation project is protection of aquatic threatened and endangered species.
- Alabama Consortium - The Alabama Consortium is a unique partnership of the Forest Service, Alabama Forestry Commission and Universities, aimed to expand forestry, education, extension and research. The scale of interest ranges from Alabama, the Southeast to the National level, with special emphasis on needs within the Blackbelt.
- TES - The Alabama sturgeon was listed (as endangered) in 2000. The blueface darter has an extremely limited range in the Bear Creek and Hubbard Creek systems, part of which are located on the Bankhead NF. Through a current Challenge Cost Share with the University of Alabama, Hubbard Creek and upper Bear Creek were surveyed in FY2000 and the blueface darter is in the process of being described and likely will receive protection. In December of 1999, the forest received a Biological Opinion on the Impacts of Forest Management and Other Activities to Indiana and Gray Bats on National Forests in Alabama. The BO was in response to the Programmatic Biological Assessment prepared by the forest in May of 1999. The BO provides specific guidelines and standards to protect the bats and their habitat.
- New FS Long-term Road Policy - Forest Service is developing a new forest road policy with several objectives: to provide managers with new scientific and analytical tools to make better decisions involving new road construction; to aggressively "decommission" or reclaim old, unneeded, or unplanned roads; to upgrade forest roads where appropriate to meet changing needs, especially increasing recreation demand on the National Forest System; and to identify sustainable funding sources for

maintaining the forest road system--such a possible funding source is the Highway Trust Fund, as the Forest Service analyzes the designation of appropriate Forest Development Roads as "public roads". The final roads analysis procedure was released early in 2000, with the completion of the "public Forest Development Roads" system set for 2002-2003, prior to the next funding for the Highway Act.

- ❑ The identification of Littleleaf disease as the cause of loblolly die-off on the Oakmulgee, Shoal Creek, and Talladega districts is adding emphasis to the need for accelerated removal of afflicted stands and reestablishment of longleaf pine stands, the historical native species which is more resistant to the disease.
- ❑ An emerging forest health issue is the need for thinning of young (17 to 35 years old), overstocked loblolly pine plantation for the purpose of reducing their risk to SPB attack.
- ❑ A two-year long investigation of timber management practices on the Shoal Creek district continues to stop its timber program and has severely hampered the management of other resources. It appears that this investigation will continue through FY 2001.

EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES ON THE LAND

Implementation of the Natural Resource Agenda on the National Forests in Alabama is an ongoing process. An important part of the process is to determine if the projects we are implementing are indeed moving resource conditions toward the desired conditions as described in the Natural Resource Agenda and the Forest Plan. Many valuable projects were completed during FY 2000 and the following discussion highlights some of the outcomes of that work by major division of land on the National Forests in Alabama National Forests in Alabama.

Bankhead

Developed recreation monitoring reveals that we cannot continue to provide the level of service desired at the current funding and staffing levels. Monitoring of the concession at Clear Creek indicates that this may be a viable management option. Corinth was also put under a concession in FY 2000. Need to continue to monitor concession operations and make necessary adjustments. Facility improvement continued in FY 2000, with SSTs (sweet smelling toilets) being installed at Flint Creek and Sipsey. Flint Creek Trail is receiving use and this use needs to continue to be closely monitored to ensure resource protection. As funding allows, improvements will be made to facilities at Owl Creek Horse Camp and Hurricane Creek Shooting Range in FY2001.

Conecuh

Overall the prescribed burning program on this district has had some very positive outcomes. Summer burns of bogs are resulting in increasing size and abundance as well as diversity of plant species, and the summer burning program, over the last 3 years, has favored and increased the wiregrass community on the Conecuh. Permanent plots were installed in FY 2000 to monitor effects of prescribe burning. Water quality monitoring of the prescribed burns on the Conecuh have shown positive results, no impairments to state waters.

Gopher tortoise populations are responding well to the ecosystem restoration efforts and management activities such as prescribed burning and thinning. Population numbers in certain areas of the Conecuh are higher than recorded previously.

Talladega Division

The horse trail relocation has resulted in better protection of the water quality and reduced risk to threatened and endangered mussels. A concession operation contract was advertised for Coleman Lake Recreation Area in FY 2000 but there were no bidders. Due to current funding and staffing levels, the quality of the recreation experience will likely not be maintained at the desired level unless concession operation is realized in the future. Also, monitoring at Pine Glen Recreation area indicates a need for a SST to replace the temporary facilities that are currently being used since the old pit toilets are unusable. Putting a SST in will also help protect riparian values in this small campground that is primarily located within the riparian area. This is to go out for bids in FY 2001.

The studies of macro-micro invertebrates (CCS Auburn) on Shoal Creek, and of the effects of prescribed burning are continuing. Results to this point show no impairment, healthy populations, and evidence of a viable aquatic ecosystem we did not realize existed so close to the head of a watershed.

Although there was a decrease in the total prescribed burning program on the forest due to the extended drought conditions during most of FY 2000, there has been a greater emphasis on utilizing growing season burns. These changes in the use of prescribed fire are showing some good results but it is really too soon to accurately evaluate the long-term outcomes. This is an activity that needs continued monitoring and evaluation to determine the outcomes and any necessary changes needed. Permanent plots were installed in FY 2000 to monitor effects of prescribe burning.

Oakmulgee Division

Recreation use remains low, need to continue to explore ways to increase use and improve the overall recreation experience for users. The proposals currently being implemented for rehabilitation at Payne Lake Recreation Area and the Payne Lake Fisheries project should have positive impact on the recreation opportunities on the district.

Tuskegee

Main recreation use continues to be on the Bartram Trail. Watershed riparian values will be enhanced by development of the alternate bike trail. The purpose of this alternate trail, which should be completed by FY 2001, is to get the mountain bike use away from the stream and out of the riparian area, where monitoring has shown that resource damage is occurring.

National Forests in Alabama

A detailed watershed analysis report was developed for 5TH level watersheds containing National Forest lands. Information from this report will assist the land management planning process and the project decision process as it relates to watershed health and forest ecosystem management.

There was a decrease in the total prescribed burning program on the Forest due to the extended drought conditions during most of FY 2000. Most units are conducting more growing season burns, and permanent monitoring plots will continue to be installed and monitored at regular intervals.

Canebrake Restoration Project on the Conecuh National Forest



FY 2000 ACTION PLAN

1. **ACTION:** Based on Forest meetings and field evaluation, agreements were made for all 4 NFs in Alabama (ref ltr 5/17/01 – 2400/3400 - Summary of Agreements Reached, Bankhead SPB Meeting). In order to improve SMZ recognition, the following agreements were made; 1) control efforts within streamside management zones (SMZ) will be the exception rather than the rule, 2) when treatment within the SMZ would have a high priority of stopping the further spread of the beetles, the site will be reviewed prior to treatment by a pre-monitoring team or a soil and/or water specialist. Their concurrence, with necessary mitigation measures, will be well documented. Mitigation measures will be implemented in the contract. Post-monitoring was discussed on numerous occasions and will be implemented to further document adequate mitigation measures as described by pre-monitoring personnel were carried out and functional. (Note: pre and post monitoring will be accomplished by biologist and archeologist with proper documentation also).

RESPONSIBILITY: Post Monitoring Team; Art Goddard – Soil Scientist, Rhonda Stewart – Forest Botanist/Ecologist, Dave Wergowske – Air Specialist (Hydrologist), Bob Pasquill – Forest Archeologist, Aquatic Biologist (vacant) and Forest Biologist (vacant).

COMPLETION DATE: October 31, 2001 (yearly report with post monitoring continuing into FY 2002 if SPB still at epidemic levels).

STATUS, FOR FY 2001 M&E REPORT:

2. **ACTION:** The NFs in Alabama need to continue to focus monitoring efforts on visibility and the effects of acid deposition in addition to acquiring funds to support acid deposition monitoring.

RESPONSIBILITY: Zone Air Specialist and the Soil, Water, & Air Unit Leader.

COMPLETION DATE: Continuous (yearly report of accomplishments).

STATUS, FOR FY 2001 M&E REPORT:

3. **ACTION:** The NFs in Alabama need to become prepared for participation in the State's planning processes that will be required to bring non-attaining counties back into NAAQS attainment. Processes involved include emissions inventory, personnel/funding, and other related issues that arise during the State planning process. In addition, Forests need to resume scheduling Forest-wide quality reviews or similar review processes to assure adequacy of the smoke management practices.

RESPONSIBILITY: Zone Air Specialist, Soil, Water, & Air Unit Leader and the Forest Fire Management Officer.

COMPLETION DATE: FY 2003 (yearly report of accomplishments through FY 2003).

STATUS, FOR FY 2001 M&E REPORT:

4. **ACTION:** Complete the review and report on status of MIS for the National Forests in Alabama. This report should include any recommendations for changes to the MIS list and/or monitoring protocols.

RESPONSIBILITY: Planning and Natural Resources Unit

COMPLETION DATE: FY 2001

STATUS, FOR FY 2001 M&E REPORT:

FY 2000 Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Summary of Forest Plan Amendments

- ~ Amendment 1 - The Record of Decision (ROD) for the EIS for the Suppression of the Southern Pine Beetle" became Amendment # 1 to the LRMP. This amendment added management requirements to the existing plan for use of integrated pest management on general forest areas, RCW habitat, and wilderness. Environmental analysis for SPB control projects can tier heavily to direction contained in this amendment.
- ~ Amendment 2 - The ROD for the "Final EIS on Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont" was incorporated into the LRMP through amendment # 2. Resource specific management requirements were added for the different types of vegetation manipulation.
- ~ Amendment 3 - The Wilderness Act of 1988 moved some lands from Management Area 2 (Wilderness Study) to Management Area 1 (Wilderness), and the remainder to Management Area 6 (Semi Primitive). The adjustments of acres required an amendment. Second, our Monitoring and Evaluation process had yielded some needed changes in some Standards and Guides. Changes made added either more emphasis or clarification to improve the effectiveness of our resource management activities.
- ~ Amendment #4 of our LRMP resulted from the Record of Decision for the "Final EIS on Vegetation Management in the Appalachian Mountains". Like Amendment #2, this was needed direction to help us in our site specific analyses and implementation of projects.
- ~ Amendment #5 - This amendment, promulgated March 27, 1989 issued a "Policy on Cutting Within 3/4 Mile of RCW Colonies on Existing Timber Sale Contracts". This amendment had some limited effects on our Timber Sale program as it dealt only with existing contracts, which were modified to comply with the policy.
- ~ Amendment #6 set the "Interim Standards and Guidelines for the Protection and Management of RCW Habitat Within 3/4

Mile of Colony Sites". This amendment set the direction for sales subsequent to the 3/27/89 policy.

- ~ Amendment #7 - This amendment, like Amendment #3, was a result of needs for change identified in our Monitoring and Evaluation process. This amendment: (1) Revise some Standards and Guides in order to clarify and/or strengthen resource management direction; (2) Add some S&G's for Air Management; (3) Update Acreage for Management Area 7 - Developed Recreation; (4) Update the Ten Year Action Plan (Appendix B) and the Monitoring and Evaluation Schedule (Appendix C).
- ~ Amendment #8 was completed in response to the designation of the Sipsey Fork, West Fork Wild and Scenic River. The purpose of the amendment was to develop management direction for the river corridor (Management Area # 3). The amended direction for Management Area # 3 was used to develop the Implementation Schedule for the River Corridor. Management direction applies to the land area in the river corridor except the area already within the Sipsey Wilderness.
- ~ Amendment # 9 changed management on the Oxford Cheaha Road on the Shoal Creek Ranger District. The Forest Plan allowed Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) use on the Oxford Cheaha Road. Due to heavy erosion and lack of adequate funds to reconstruct, a decision was made to restore the Oxford Cheaha Road but not to a condition that could tolerate any type of vehicle use so this amendment was put in place to stop all OHV use on the road.
- ~ Amendment #10 - This amendment changed the horse use policy for the Forest due to increasing environmental damage. This amendment limited equestrian use to designated equestrian trails and open roads except by permit of the District Ranger.
- ~ Amendment #11 - This amendment was completed in response to the 5-Year Review. Included in this amendment are: a change to Forest-wide standard and guideline (S&G) 4.c., on page IV-8 to allow prescribe burning for specific purposes during spring nesting season when coordinated with the Forest Biologist and local State game & Fish Biologist; incorporated the State BMPs; deleted a S&G on page IV-8 that addressed road construction; added 4 S&Gs for timber to address pine straw raking and management activities in the vicinity of sinkholes, caves and certain blufflines; and made some target adjustments in the wildlife and fish program.
- ~ Amendment #12 - This amendment added and changed several recreation for trails and Off-Road Vehicle Use S&Gs and updated Output Tables, Resource Summaries, Desired Future Condition write up, and management practices. The amendment was completed in response to increased demand for trails on the Bankhead National Forest and a special appropriation for trail construction on the Bankhead National Forest. This amendment allows 82 additional miles of trail to be added to the system on the Bankhead NF over the next three years.

- ~ Amendment #13 - This amendment was a result of the FY 1992 Monitoring and Evaluation Report and included some target adjustments and changes to standards and guidelines mostly for the wildlife and fish program. One S&G was changed for shear and rake operation and one was changed in wildlife and fish (stream structures became fisheries structures). The amendment also included some target adjustments for the range and wildlife programs.
- ~ Amendment #14 - This amendment replaced Appendix I in the Forest Plan with new streamside management guidelines. The need for the new streamside protection was identified in the Five-Year Review and was in response to newly listed threatened and endangered freshwater mussels and the State Best Management Practices which were included in amendment # 11.
- ~ Amendment #15 - The Record of Decision for the "Final EIS for the Management of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region" was incorporated into the LRMP through this amendment. This amendment added and changed management requirements for protection and management of red-cockaded woodpeckers and their habitat, identified tentative Habitat Management Areas (HMAs) and established tentative population objectives.
- ~ Amendment #16 - This amendment designated three sites on the Talladega and Shoal Creek Districts, as communication sites. This project is associated with the chemical incineration safety plan for the new incinerator at the Anniston Army Depot.
- ~ Amendment #17 - This amendment changed the wording of the Standard/Guideline (Vegetation Management Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Coastal Plain/Piedmont and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Appalachian Mountains) for adequate information for proposed, endangered, threatened, sensitive (PETS) species for project level biological evaluations. The purpose of this amendment was to clarify the Standard/Guideline. Using the appropriate information (as reworded), effects analyses will be made, disclosed, and documented for PETS species. In addition, ESA Section 7 consultation procedures for PET species will be conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as specified in FSM 2671.4.

Status of the 1999 Monitoring and Evaluation Action Plan

1. **ACTION:** Continue monitoring trail use and conditions on the Kentuck and Flint Creek trails.
RESPONSIBILITY: Bankhead and Talladega District personnel with assistance from SO as needed.
COMPLETION DATE: Ongoing throughout FY 2000
STATUS, FOR FY 2000 M&E REPORT: Continued monitoring and maintenance of both trails in FY2000.
2. **ACTION:** Continue acid deposition monitoring project with the air program, as funding allows.
RESPONSIBILITY: Air Resource Specialist
COMPLETION DATE: FY 2000.
STATUS, FOR FY 2000 M&E REPORT: Monitoring continued in FY 2000, but funding still needed for future monitoring.
3. **ACTION:** Survey for the newly listed (and found) Gulf Sturgeon.
RESPONSIBILITY: Fisheries biologist
COMPLETION DATE: FY 2000.
STATUS, FOR FY 2000 M&E REPORT: Surveyed section (15 kilometers) of Five Runs Creek but no Gulf Sturgeon found. Working on Challenge Cost Share agreement to continue inventory for this species.
4. **ACTION:** Begin collecting new data on lotic fish and compare with historical data.
RESPONSIBILITY: Fisheries biologist
COMPLETION DATE: FY 2000.

STATUS, FOR FY 2000 M&E REPORT: Began collecting data for various streams but should be continued/expanded.

Summary of Field Reviews and Other Administrative Activities

1. The Forest completed formal Quality Reviews (Integrated Program Reviews) of the Oakmulgee and Conecuh Ranger Districts during FY 2000. Below is a summary of Forest Supervisor recommendations from these reviews.

Oakmulgee Ranger District

-- In reference to NEPA/NFMA, GIS, and Loblolly die-off strategy – Develop an action plan for process and focus, including who, what, when, and in what ways the district will carry out this vision. Use GIS to plan at least a 3-year program of forest health proposals to provide for a smooth scheduling of NEPA process. Also, use GIS for analysis and maps to provide the public.

-- In reference to Compartment 20 Timber Sale (EAs, ATSA, & timber sale contracts) – The forest will develop a process of how to best document changes or deviations from NEPA decisions to implementation. The acreage differences between what is planned and finally implemented poses a problem for OIG and OGC. The District did a good job of making corrections to stands that had either been deleted or added for entry in Compartments 20 & 66. Such corrections need to be done after sale preparation but before the sale of the timber. The District will develop a checklist certifying that the decisions made, including mitigation measures, in the Decision Notice and EA have been reviewed and carried forward into project implementation or those not carried forward or modified have been appropriately documented in the project EA. The checklist should identify the reasons for differences in acreages and for adding, deleting, or modifying stands analyzed in the EA. Once agreed to, it will be included with each timber sale appraisal or service contract package. The District will include the Silviculturist in all future timber sale closure audits and will initial off on check item #3, KV account. The District is directed to comply with FS handbook direction of reviewing and updating KV plans annually and at sale closure. In future EAs, the District will ensure that mitigation requirements are specific to the project being analyzed.

- In reference to timber sale management and accountability – The district needs to improve office management practices and financial management for timber sales. The District will submit an action plan on how it plans to get statements of account, sale records, and files in order and keep them in order. The Timber Sale Audit Checklist provided to the District should be incorporated into this plan. The Timber and Forest Health Unit will conduct periodic unannounced reviews until such time that the problems are corrected.

- In reference to office management of timber sale records and files – The District should review and follow FSH 1109.12 on proper procedures for filing; FSH 2409.15 on proper procedure for setting up and maintaining timber sale folders; and FSH 2409.18, Timber Sale Preparation Handbook.

- In reference to Timber Information Manager (TIM) management and accountability – The District needs additional support and practice with the TIM program. To assist in that need, the District will contact Timber and Forest Health to schedule additional training on the TIM program.

- In reference to tracer paint management and accountability – The District does a good job of managing and accounting for tracer paint. The problem of not recording the disposal of empties has been corrected.

- In reference to pesticide management and accountability – Overall, the District does a good job of managing and accounting for pesticides. One suggested improvement would be the development of a more reliable system to track pesticide usage.

- In reference to Biological Evaluations (BEs) – Utilize and confer with Forest botanist/ecologist and Forest fisheries biologist to assure all known presence/absence information is incorporated. This could be helpful in supporting determinations with surveys, notes, and/or letters from the Forest specialist and used as documentation for current or future projects. There is no need to modify BE template or format since all component parts are present. To ease review and assure filing of foraging analysis, a copy should be attached to the file copy of the BE or incorporated into the document. Clarification, for species which do not occur in the watershed, could be better represented with a statement that includes which species are known to occur on the unit, but not present in the project area. Additional support for sensitive species determination could be gained by conferencing with Forest specialists.

- In reference to Management Indicator Species (MIS) – Continue to work with Forest personnel, similar to Wiggins EA process, to select MIS species, document rationale for selection and non-selection of MIS species and document survey information of MIS species.

-- In reference to inventory/monitoring documentation (NFIM) – Additional data collection of other PETS and MIS species would help substantiate determinations and support decisions. A few options are (1) utilize Forest specialists for surveys, (2) develop agreements with local universities, state agencies or local organizations to collect information, (3) develop survey methods of other species and use force account personnel to implement, or (4) focus limited funds on different species groups annually to collect supportive information.

-- In reference to Indiana bats – Slight modifications to new standards and guidelines (USFWS Biological Opinion, December 1999) should be incorporated into proposed actions and decisions. These modifications include, but are not limited to (1) in SPB sites, leaving blacktopped trees and red-topped trees (with loose bark) instead of all red-topped trees, (2) documenting and reporting any trees, designated for retention, that are incidentally downed as agreed to in incidental take authorization, or (3) removing 60 day timeline for SPB suppression action.

-- In reference to landlines on ground and stored records – A district map should be used for each year’s maintenance. The maps can be stored in the landline status atlas and tabbed for easy use in locating rotation needs, etc. An attempt should be made to move toward some “block” type system. This eliminates having to search through the entire atlas for rotation needs and minimizes the opportunity for oversight in selection of the same.

-- In reference to fire presuppression preparedness – As part of the monthly vehicle inspection, slip-on units should be inspected for service needs. Fire tools should not be left out in the weather.

-- In reference to prescribed burn planning and execution – Continue making prescribe burn plans that address the needs of each unit. Make sure that the objective listed in the plan can be measured and steps are carried out as called for in the plan.

-- In reference to fire dispatch recording – Recommend that all dispatch records be recorded in one permanent bound book. The reason for this is that the validity of dispatch logs for legal documentation requires the log be kept in a permanent bound book.

-- In reference to weather documentation and reporting – Recommend that the person assigned this responsibility be held accountable for providing timely accurate information and that there are back-up personnel trained and available. It is extremely important that this information be provided to the District FMO for determination of fire stand-by needs and if within parameters to conduct prescribed burns. The lack of this information results in unnecessary safety risks to personnel and resources.

-- In reference to maintenance of Vick Shooting Range – The District’s action plan should outline a regular, scheduled maintenance plan for this facility. The plan should include specific tasks, persons responsible, frequency, and provisions for monitoring by the

Ranger and staff. The recreation Unit will monitor the range condition with site visits at least quarterly and provide feedback to the Ranger and Forest Supervisor.

-- In reference to sign maintenance – The District should develop a sign plan, which includes information on all non-traffic signs. The suggested format includes date of installation, map of location, type of sign, procurement source, a photograph, and a maintenance log.

-- In reference to road closure – The District needs to develop a system for monitoring road closures. Gates or blocks should be checked on a regular basis and any violations corrected promptly. Where a pattern emerges, law enforcement should be notified.

-- In reference to Payne Lake Recreation Area rehabilitation – The schedule of planned actions is to follow the 9-step process for recreation projects. Scoping of the proposed action will be followed by design narrative development, as well as survey and design of the new water system. The contract will likely be advertised in 2001.

-- In reference to recreation fee collection and accounting – It is recommended that the Forest implement unannounced fiscal audits on the Oakmulgee District as well as all other units, as recommended by the Regional audit team. Any irregularities found should be corrected promptly.

Conecuh Ranger District

-- In reference to NEPA tracking/protocol and review of EAs for Compartments 55,56,57 and Compartments 43,45 – The District should review FSH 1909.15 (NEPA Handbook), Chapter 18, and the NEPA Guidebook for Alabama for the process to make changes to decisions. After review of these documents, re-visit the change made to Compartments 43 and 45, and supplement documentation. Review any other changes to decisions that are still being implemented, check for protocol, and make any necessary changes.

-- In reference to contract implementation of the decisions – The District is to be commended on the quality implementation of the EA decisions and their associated mitigation measures for the two EAs reviewed. Two minor discrepancies were found. The District is directed to either modify the Eat RCW Timber Sale Contract to include the mitigation slash treatment along Boggy Hollow and Mountain City roads or adequately document in the project file why this action is not being implemented. The District is also directed to document the reasons for the acreage differences in the EA file and take appropriate actions to ensure differences are linked back to the project file on future projects.

-- In reference to decision tracking – A decision tracking system, or form, needs to be developed and standardized for use in Alabama. The district should share the form currently used in tracking decisions for consideration, and the S.O. will develop a Forest-wide system.

-- In reference to timber marking, cruising, appraisals, and contracts – The Sandstone Hill #2 Sale was found to have been implemented appropriately, meeting the thinning objectives described in the Compartment 43 & 45 EA. The East RCW Sale contract will need to be modified to correct the identification of Unit 1 as DxD unit when actually it should have been Unit 5. The District is directed to discontinue the cruising of trees smaller than 5.0 inches dbh, as this is below current minimum merchantability standards for yellow pine.

-- In reference to timber sale administration – The District sale administrator has been doing an excellent job and gets a quality job done by purchasers. Sale inspections were well documented. Paint checks were being done but not to standards in the R8 Theft Prevention Plan. The TSA is directed to comply with the minimum number of paint checks of 2 per payment unit.

-- In reference to office management of ATSA – The District will develop some type of “holding” tray for their statements until they can be audited and then filed. If discrepancies are found, not only make notations on statements, but also let the appropriate person know so that changes can be made in TSA within that month and be reflected on the next months statement.

-- In reference to office management of timber sale records and files – The District is to review and follow FSH 1109.12, Directive Preparation Handbook, Chapter 4, on proper procedures for filing. The District can request handbooks, manuals, contracts, or provisions from the S.O. It is recommended that the District maintain a hard copy of all contracts and special provisions so that they are readily available.

-- In reference to Timber Information Manager (TIM) management and accountability – The District needs additional support and practice with the TIM program. TO assist in that need, the District will contact the Timber and Forest Health Unit to schedule additional TIM training.

-- In reference to paint accountability – The District is to be commended on the well-organized storage building and complete, accurate inventory records. The District LEO is encouraged to make and document spot security checks. The Supervisor’s Office is to provide the district with a copy of FSH 2409.12, covering tracer paint accountability.

-- In reference to pesticide storage and accountability – The pesticide storage building was found to be extremely clean and well

organized. Required safety items were in place and inventory records were up to date. No actions are required.

-- In reference to site preparation and reforestation – Reviewed the site preparation and machine planting of Compartment 29, Stand 23, and looked at a stand in Compartment 30 that was planted 5 years ago and burned this winter. No actions needed, sites and seedlings look good.

-- In reference to silviculture program in general – The District has a well-managed silviculture program. The KV automated tracking system has worked well in tracking collections, expenditures, work planned, and accomplishments. No action needed. The other districts in Alabama need to use a similar automated KV tracking system. The Supervisor's Office is to work on this.

-- In reference to bat cave protection – Yellow River Cave (also know as Rockhouse Cave) is historically known to have been utilized by numerous southeastern Myotis. Identification (by species expert) is needed to determine if the southeastern (M. austroriparius) or gray bat (M. grisescens) are present. The cave should be protected if vandalism continues to be a problem, since Myotis are sensitive to disturbance during hibernation and reproductive seasons (November – July). The Forest biologist will schedule a follow-up visit to determine if further recommendations are needed.

-- In reference to roads (GIS and roads policy) – The District is directed to digitize the needed roads into the GIS roads layer to facilitate the Plan Revision analysis. There was discussion of the Roads Analysis Process. All roads on the District (system and historical) will be used in the Roads Analysis.

2. Fire Management conducted fire readiness reviews on each district that covered pre-suppression capability and the prescribed burning accomplishments and documentation.

3. Additional fixed monitoring plots were established on the Talladega, Oakmulgee, and Conecuh Districts to monitor prescribed burning activities. Ten percent of previously established plots (1999) were revisited.

Appendix E

Summary of Significant Research Findings and Updated Research Needs

1. Loblolly die-off on the Oakmulgee, Shoal Creek, and Talladega found to be caused by Littleleaf disease. (Continue cooperation with Forest Health Unit).
2. Fresh water mussels - Study to determine life history, impacts of forest management and monitoring techniques to determine population trends.
3. Effects of growing season prescribed burning (versus dormant season burning) on micro flora and fauna species composition.
4. Valuation of non-market attributes within the National Forests; i.e. recreation, wildlife, scenery, etc.
5. Effects of uneven-aged management on the various plant communities found in Alabama. Concurrently study on various methods used to regenerate longleaf pine - effects on RCW recovery.
6. Verification study to complete historical vegetation occurrences on National Forest lands.
7. Role of hardwoods in "mountain" longleaf pine ecosystems.
8. Effects of newly developed herbicides on Alabama ecosystems.
9. Creation of techniques/cultural practices for establishment of streakorous fern according to recovery plan.
10. Define impacts of resource management activities on flattened musk turtle.
11. Impacts of acidic atmospheric deposition on aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Use management indicator species (MIS), if appropriate. If MIS are not appropriate, identify species that would be appropriate.
12. Effects of prescribed burning in mesic and hardwood habitats.
13. Effects of uneven-aged management on the various plant communities found in Alabama. Concurrently study on various methods used to regenerate longleaf pine - effects on RCW recovery.

