

November 1, 2004

Dear Forest User

This letter is to advise you that portions of my July 1, 2004 decision to amend the National Forests in Florida Forest Plan were appealed. The primary concern was that the Forest Service is not using prescribed fire to the extent needed to improve scrub-jay habitat. Fire is an important component of scrub-jay habitat and is also a tool that can be used by land managers to enhance habitat conditions for this Federally threatened species when conditions are appropriate.

As a result of the informal disposition process of this appeal, I am making three modifications to my July 1, 2004 decision to further clarify the use of seeding techniques and prescribed fire in our efforts to manage Florida scrub-jay habitat. The changes include rewording existing Forest Plan Standard 8.1-4, currently in the Forest Plan, and adding this revised standard to Management Area 8.2 (Sand Pine, Mixed Regeneration, Moderate Openings).

The revised standards are as follows:

Revised 8.1-4 and new standard 8.2-7

Emphasize prescribed fire for site preparation. If prescribed fire does not, or is not expected to adequately remove large biomass and incorporate it into the soil, or is not feasible, mechanical site preparation is allowed.

In addition, as a result of the above modifications, it was also determined that the wording of standard 8.1-6 and 8.2-5 should also be modified as follows:

Revised 8.1-6 and 8.2-5 wording

1) Following timber harvests, improve the quality and extend the period of suitability of sand pine scrub habitat for Florida scrub-jays, scrub lizards, gopher tortoises and other species requiring open, early successional scrub, by reducing coarse woody debris, increasing occurrence of bare sand surfaces, and creating areas with fewer sand pine and wider-spaced scrub oak. To regenerate the stands, use one or more of the following seeding techniques ~~singly or in combination. These may be carried out independent of, or in combination with prescribed fire.~~

1. Delay machine seeding by 1 year to determine if natural regeneration meets minimum seeding levels and eliminates need to artificially seed.
2. Conduct seeding in an every-other-row pattern.

3. Select core areas of at least 2 acres each and totaling more than 5% of stand area, to exclude from machine seeding. Log landings are inappropriate for core areas.
4. Select core areas of more than 2 acres each and totaling more than 5% of stand area, to treat with 2 passes of a drum-chopper, and exclude from machine seeding. Log landings are inappropriate for core areas.

I have reviewed these changes with respect to the environmental consequences associated with my previous decision. I have determined that these changes do not have an effect on the environmental consequences and that additional analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS is not necessary.

As a result of these changes, the appellants have agreed to withdraw the appeal of Amendment #2 to the Forest Plan and it is now in effect. The amendment is available in full on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida, or on request from this office.

If you have any questions related to amendment #2 of the 1999 Forest Plan, please contact David Harris at (850) 523-8582.

Sincerely

Marsha Kearney
Forest Supervisor