

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
Amendment of Forest-wide Standard VG-24

USDA Forest Service
National Forests in Florida

Baker, Columbia, Franklin, Lake, Leon, Liberty, Marion, Putnam, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa,
Wakulla, and Walton Counties, Florida

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

Management of sand pine on the Ocala National Forest is critical to the long-term viability of the Florida scrub-jay, which is federally listed as a threatened species. It is found only in peninsular Florida, nesting in oak or pine scrub habitat, and the Ocala National Forest is the only National Forest with this habitat type.

Based on current conditions and short-term future projections to the year 2009, the current standard and objectives in the Forest Plan designed to enhance the habitat for the Florida scrub-jay are anticipated to result in management conflicts over the next several years.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which will remove Forest-wide standard VG-24 from the 1999 LRMP.

When compared to the other alternatives this alternative is expected to allow greater management flexibility to more effectively meet the goals and objectives in the 1999 LRMP related to the Florida scrub-jay and its habitat. There are unpredictable variables involved in the distribution of habitats on the Ocala National Forest. Wildfires and hurricanes can change the age class distribution without warning. For this reason, monitoring the effectiveness of sand pine age class distribution will be key. The Forest will continue to monitor Forest Plan objectives 9, 19 and 21 and will make additional changes as needed based on new species information and habitat changes.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered 2 other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 4-5.

Alternative 1

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the current 1999 Revised LRMP would not be amended and the Forest service would continue to analyze site-specific projects using Forest-wide standard VG-24.

Alternative 3

Modify Forest-wide standard VG-24 to state:

“Manage sand pine greater than 50 years of age to be distributed on lands both suitable and unsuitable for timber production.”

Public Involvement

The need for this action arose in 2004 based on Forest Plan Monitoring. A proposal to amend the LRMP was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in 2005. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping April 22, 2005 to May 27, 2005.

Using the comments from the public, and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team identified one significant issue to the proposed action. This issue questioned the possibility that all older sand pine could be limited to unsuitable areas such as wilderness areas. (see EA page 4). To address these concerns, the Forest Service created alternative 3 described above.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the amendment (see EA pages 5-15).
5. The Ocala National Forest has considerable experience with the management of scrub-jay habitat. With the exception of uncontrollable impacts from natural events such as hurricanes or wildfires, the effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 5-15).

6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 5).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because this amendment is a for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. This amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 5).
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA pages 5, 8, and 15).
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA page 15).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

NFMA Significance: This amendment is not a significant change in the Florida Revised Forest Plan. The determination that this is a non-significant amendment is made in accordance with the regulations in 16 USC 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f), and the Forest Service Manual 1922.5, Land and Resource Management Planning, Amendments. This plan amendment meets the criteria for a non-significant amendment because these changes will not “significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goals and objectives originally projected...[or] have an important effect on the entire forest plan or affect resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period (FSM 1922.52)

Implementation Date

Implementation of this decision may occur after seven calendar days following publication of the legal notice of the decision.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, and be filed in duplicate with the Regional Forester within 45 days after the date of the published legal notice. Appeals should be sent to the following address:

USDA Forest Service
ATTN: Regional Forester

1720 Peachtree Rd., N.W., Suite 811N
Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102

The Appeal Deciding Officer is Charles L. Myers, Regional Forester. The appeal may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed on federal holidays. Any notice of appeal must include at a minimum:

- A statement identifying the document as a Notice of Appeal pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the applicant.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which the appeal is being made.
- The reason(s) for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

The Forest Plan Amendment Project Record is available for public review at the National Forests in Florida Forest Supervisors Office, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee FL 32303. To review the Project Record, contact David Harris at the Supervisors Office. Copies of the Environmental Assessment and questions concerning this document can be directed to David Harris, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303 or (850) 523-8582.

/s/ Marsha Kearney
Marsha Kearney

06/12/2006
Date

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~~VG-24~~ Manage suitable forestland acres of sand pine to maintain 5 percent in age classes from 55 to 80.