

**Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact**

**Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
Amendment 7, Distribution of Scrub Jay Management
Area 8.4 Acres and Management Area Standard 8.4-4.**

**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

During the LRMP Revision process completed in 1999, the Forest Service evaluated two Management Areas (MAs) designed principally to provide habitat for the federally listed Florida scrub-jay. While both MAs are designed to benefit the Florida scrub-jay, MA 8.4 relies more on non-commercial actions such as prescribed fire. Under MA 8.4, the initial treatment of existing mature sand pine is completed using commercial timber harvest. The stand is then maintained in early successional scrub oak conditions using prescribed burns at 15-year intervals. Under MA 8.2, mature stands of sand pine are treated using commercial harvest, but allowed to regenerate to sand pine. The result is that under MA 8.2, the scrub-jay habitat is constantly rotating location every 15 years, while under MA 8.4, the areas are established and somewhat permanent in location.

At the time of Revision, there was a concern that the Forest Service would be unable to treat large areas on a non-commercial basis. As a result, only one MA 8.4 area of 1,874 acres was established on the Seminole Ranger District. While this is still of concern, the Forest Service also believes that having an additional area of static, long-term habitat located in the Northern portion of the Forest may be important to reconsider.

Decision

Based upon my review of the alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2, which will change approximately 988 acres of MA 8.2 to MA 8.4 and amend the language of Management Area Standard 8.4-4 to allow for mechanical treatment if needed.

Based on public comment received during the comment period for the pre-decisional Environmental Assessment (EA), I have further modified Management Area Standard 8.4-4 to clarify the role, and conditions for use of mechanical treatments verses prescribed fire. In addition, a guideline was added to support the desired condition of the area with regard to the frequency of narrow road corridors.

These modifications were determined to not have any effect on the potential impacts of this amendment as originally circulated for public comment.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 5-6.

Alternative 1 *No Action*

Under the No Action alternative, the current 1999 Revised LRMP would not be amended and future land acquisitions for the FNST would continue to be managed in a custodial mode according to standard LA-3.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in September 2006. A letter was mailed July 31, 2006 notifying 275 individuals, groups and other agencies of our intention and requesting any comments or potential issues on the proposed. No negative comments were received. On December 21, 2006 a pre-decisional EA was released for a 30-day comment period. Comments are summarized in Appendix A of the EA.

Based on public comment and internal review, no significant issues were identified for this amendment, and no other alternatives were needed.

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 5-7).
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 pages 5-7).
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 5-7).
5. The National Forests in Florida has considerable experience with the management of the Florida scrub-jay. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 5-7).

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 pages 5-7).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 5-7).
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 pages 5-7). 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 pages 5-7).
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 5-7).
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 pages 5-7).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

NFMA Significance: This amendment is not a significant change to the 1999 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida. 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 in the Tallahassee Democrat.

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.

<u> /s/ Marsha Kearney </u>	<u> 02/23/2007 </u>
Marsha Kearney	Date
Forest Supervisor	

APPENDIX A AMENDED PAGES

Deleted language is indicated by a ~~striethrough~~. Additions are indicated by **bold** font. Note that some changes to acreage figures and the allocation map in the following pages are the result of updated GIS information and are not the result of this amendment.

**Management Area 8.2
Sand Pine, Mixed Regeneration, Moderate Openings**

Ocala NF	171,507 acres in LTA 1
	170,518
	9,157 acres in LTA 2
	14,609 acres in LTA 3
	74 acres in LTA 5
	<u>5,796</u> acres in LTA 6
	201,143 total acres
	199,291

VQO = 10% Preservation & 90% Modification
ROS = 20% Semiprimitive, Motorized & 80% Roaded Natural

Table 4.7
MA 8.2 Suitability for Timber Production

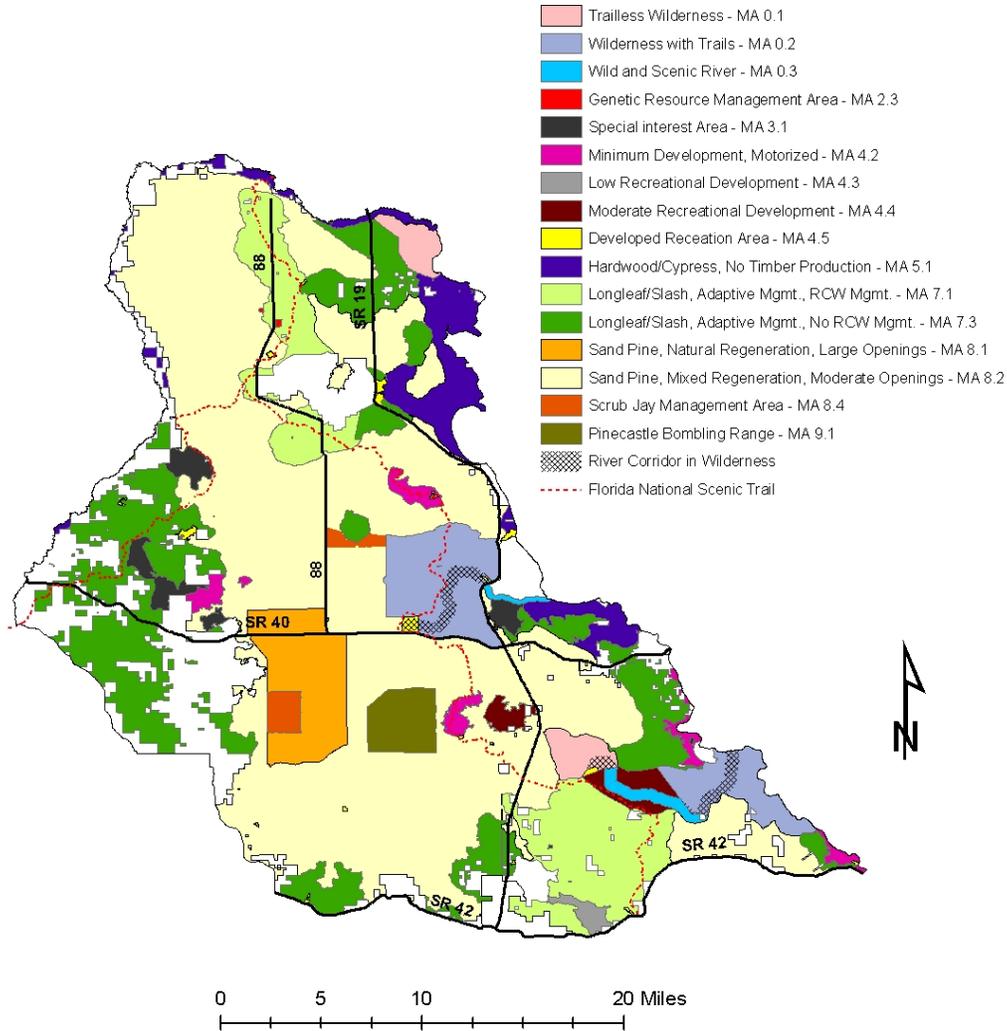
	Acres
Nonforestland	8,704
Inadequate Information	724
Developed Recreation Sites	79
Special Interest Areas	52
Threatened & Endangered Species Sites	226
Unsuitable Hardwood	11,955
Streamside Management Zones	<u>846</u>
Total Acres Unsuitable for Timber	22,586
Production	
Total Acres Suitable for Timber Production	178,557
	177,569

**Management Area 8.4
Scrub-Jay Management Area**

Ocala NF	<u>1,874</u> acres in LTA 1
	4,874 total acres
	2,862

Management Areas

Ocala National Forest



Map created on 12/18/2006 by J. Drake
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Amended Forest Plan Page 4-48

Management area standard 8.4-4

After clearcutting, prescribe burn the area to start natural regeneration of scrub oak. Prescribe burn when the vegetation has grown so old that its quality as scrub-jay habitat is degraded. Delay burning if active nesting is present. **While burning is the preferred method of treatment, mechanical treatments may be utilized if conditions do not allow burning. Mechanical treatment may be delayed for up to 3 years past optimum age for regeneration unless conditions indicate a need for immediate action. Stands previously regenerated by mechanical treatments should have highest priority for burning if safety and fire containment provisions can still be met.**

Infrastructure

Management Area Standard 8.4-6

Narrow travel corridors not needed for management activities are physically closed where possible during site-specific project implementation.