

**Bankhead National Forest**  
**Liaison Panel Meeting Summary**  
**May 14, 2015**  
**Double Springs, Alabama**

**Forest Service Attendees:**

Dave Casey, Bankhead District Ranger  
Kelly Balcarczyk, Nature-Based Tourism and Economic Development Specialist, National Forests in Alabama  
Allison Cochran, Bankhead Wildlife Biologist  
Lorenzo Walton, Bankhead Pre-Sale Forester

**Liaison Panel Members:**

James Alexander  
Randy Feltman  
Mark Kolinski  
Charles Borden  
Anthony Hood  
John Howell  
Jud Easterwood

**Public Attendees:**

Mike Bagwell  
James Barnacastle  
Matt Laschet  
Patricia Alexander  
Joey Stephenson  
Denise Rowell

6:00	<b>District Ranger Welcome &amp; Ground Rules</b>	<b>Dave Casey</b> District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	<b>Feral Swine Survey And Study Updates</b>	<b>Wes Stone</b> Professor, Alabama A&M Univ.
6:45	<b>Black Warrior Waterdog, Federal Listing And Critical Habitat Proposal</b>	<b>Matt Laschet</b> Biologist, US Fish & Wildlife Serv.
7:15	<b>Understory Restoration (NWSG) Graduate Research Project Proposal</b>	<b>Lorenzo Walton</b> Forester, USFS, Bankhead
7:30	<b>Houston Longleaf Pine and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project</b>	<b>Dave Casey</b> District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
7:45	<b>Recreation Program Facilitated Discussion</b>	<b>Dave Casey,</b>

**Kelly Balcarczyk**  
USFS  
**Dave Casey,**  
District Ranger,

8:15           **Closeout**  
Next meeting & agenda items  
USFS, Bankhead  
Other panel business items

**Ranger Casey** opened the meeting with a welcome and an invitation for a Liaison Panel Discussion. Ranger Casey wants to keep the Panel relevant and strong, working together to develop agenda items, and do a pulse check. As several members were absent, there was a discussion to continue this conversation at future meetings.

**Wes Stone** introduced a nationwide survey of landowners that he is helping conduct for USDA – APHIS on feral swine. He also provided updates on Alabama A&M’s research projects on feral swine. Wes’s students conducted a small research project on sow reproductive physiology and pregnancy and also are conducting a project on feral swine use of prescribed burn sites using pig survey sign. Anna Campos worked on the sow reproduction survey. While the project objectives were not met, Anna was able to gain some information about Bankhead’s sows. She collected and analyzed 10 sows from Bankhead of various sizes and ages. Three had signs of pregnancy, seven did not. One sow was post-partum in May. Two sows were pregnant in September (one with 8 fetuses and one with 5). Seven sows were ovulating in June and July but had not been pregnant. More feral swine were needed to complete the project objectives. Patience Knight has a project to look at response and activity changes after prescribed burning and use of riparian areas. Patience is recording pig sign to see if there is a change in frequency of sign after management activities. To date, there is no significant difference in the amount/frequency of sign, it is highly variable.

There was a question about disease testing. None was done in Wes’s projects. USDA – APHIS tests for diseases regularly.

Wes shared a nation-wide feral swine survey. USDA-APHIS is conducting a survey of landowners. Wes is helping Tuskegee University distribute and compile the survey. Surveys were distributed at the panel meeting.

**Matt Laschet**, US Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist, shared a presentation introducing the proposal to list the Black Warrior Waterdog through the Endangered Species Act. A copy of Matt’s presentation is available from the Bankhead National Forest or by contacting Matt.

The Black Warrior waterdog is an aquatic salamander found above the fall line in the Black Warrior River Basin in seven counties. It occurs on Bankhead National Forest. Very little is known about its life history, but it occurs in clear rocky streams with good water quality. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is in the process of assessing whether the waterdog should be listed as threatened, endangered or if listing is not warranted at this time. The waterdog has been a candidate for federal listing since 1982. If the Black Warrior waterdog is listed, critical habitat will be designated at the same time. Listing and critical habitat do not apply to private

landowners unless they have federal funds/grants. A proposed rule is expected in 2015 with a final rule on listing in 2016.

There was much discussion on how projects might affect the waterdog and how listing and critical habitat protect/impact the species.

**Lorenzo Walton** introduced his master's research project proposal. Lorenzo is implementing a research project on understory restoration associated with pine woodland restoration. He will plant plugs of big bluestem grasses on Bankhead in areas that have been harvested. He will evaluate success of establishment and differences in establishment and survival in areas that have been thinned, clear-cut and not harvested with differing layers of slash, shade and competition. A copy of Lorenzo's power point presentation is available from the Bankhead National Forest.

**Ranger Casey** provided information and updates on the Houston Longleaf Environmental Assessment Project and the Owl Creek Trail Improvements Project. The Bankhead is developing the Houston Longleaf EA project proposal. A copy of the Houston Longleaf EA scoping letter was provided. We are requesting input on the project at this time. The area is within Land Management Prescription 9C3, Southern Cumberland Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance. It also is within Bankhead's Quail Emphasis Areas. The project includes the Houston and Corinth developed recreation areas. Ranger Casey invited the public to review the scoping, visit the areas and provide input on the project.

Ranger Casey also reminded the panel about the Owl Creek Trail Improvements Project introduced at the last meeting. The Bankhead is responding to a request for more/new riding opportunities that reduce maintenance. The result is that 8 sections will be addressed and specialists have reviewed the proposed areas. Two areas were identified as potential problems accessing Owl Creek. The Forest Service will decommission user created trails. You should expect to see and email about this project within the next month or so.

Ranger Casey also shared updates on the Flint Creek multi-use/ATV trail. Flint Creek trail was closed for five weeks this past winter and spring due to weather and to alleviate soil and water issues. Bankhead conducted maintenance actions on the most pressing/needed areas during the closure. As we go forward with Flint Creek, we expect that seasonal closures may be warranted. We are not in a situation to maintain it to the level that it is needed and resources issues are present and occurring. The Bankhead will be looking at the trail and conducting an assessment. The panel asked how often is the trail used and how much damage is occurring. The Bankhead hired a retired FS Law Enforcement Officer to work the trail on weekends and to document use and illegal vs. legal riding. The first weekend he observed about 100 riders, some illegal. The resource damage could be much worse considering how little maintenance has occurred. There were a few places where sediment was moving into the creek and those have been addressed. There was a suggestion that with the new Polaris Plant coming to Limestone County there may be skyrocketing use at Flint Creek. The use is the highest during the muddiest (wettest) time of the year. At Indian Creek where there is a bridge crossing, it would take serious control efforts to keep people out of the creek.

**Ranger Casey** shared some thoughts on the Liaison Panel. Very few forests can enjoy an interested group such as the Bankhead Liaison Panel. At the same time, the Ranger wants the panel to be all it can be and function as well as it can. When the panel formed 15 years ago, the purpose was hyper clear; everyone knew why they were there. Today, we can improve on that. We want to be a panel where everyone is interested without a “problem” to precipitate involvement and interest. We’d like to review the mission and goals. Are they occurring? Are they relevant? Do they need updating? There were goals and objectives set in 2008. They need updating. We will continue to delve more in to this subject in future meetings. It’s possible a steering committee is needed to develop agendas. The Ranger would like to see more input on what the panel wants to know about. There was a discussion on membership. Daryl Lawson recommends replacing him on the panel with Lisa Gardner as Alabama A&M’s representation. We’ll need consensus on that and confirmation that Lisa can attend meetings. There was a discussion on the attendance issue. A suggestion was made to “purge the roster” of folks that don’t attend and update the charter to include some required attendance. Originally the group may have been involved in more conflict resolution; today we are working towards preventing conflicts. There are many groups not represented, for example atv riders.

Ranger Casey and Kelly Balcarczyk led a discussion on the Bankhead recreation program. The National Forests in Alabama’s recreation staff came to Bankhead to evaluate Houston Rec Area. It’s evident an influx of cash is needed get Houston up to a sustainable place. It became apparent that the Bankhead needs to look at bigger issues and picture beyond Houston and assess the entire recreation program. Should we be providing recreation opportunities on National Forest that you can do anywhere, when there is nothing special about those being found on the National Forest? What type of recreation should the NF be providing? What does the public want? Sustainable recreation not impacting ecosystems and highlighting the National Forest? Ecotourism for communities? Not duplicating efforts that are available on parks and/or private lands? What is the budget needed and how can partners participate in operations for the long-term? There was a lengthy brain-storming session on these ideas and whether this issue should be taken up through the forum of the Liaison Panel, a separate group, or a subcommittee of the Panel. How can we get a productive, collaborative discussion going to produce a plan of what we offer? What’s our niche? Tonight’s objective is to gauge everyone’s interest in participating. There is great interest and much discussion on this subject. What/how should this group/process look like? Who should be invited to the discussion? There was discussion of the horse trail subcommittee in the past, as an example for this process. Would that be limited to panel members or others? All would be open, public meetings. Discussion that it should be a facilitated discussion. If we use the scheduled liaison panel meetings as the forum for the recreation discussions, it would take multiple meetings to get to any sort of conclusion because of potential conflicts/discussion opportunities that may arise.

The Ranger cannot facilitate and participate. Full involvement of the panel is desired. The goal is to look at the overall recreation strategy, not pieces like horse trails or back packing and not just what is currently represented or occurring. It will be important to include an educational and interpretation aspect. For now, the panel would like the new stakeholders and community members to be invited as a special working group focused on recreation. However,

the working group may be a way to attract new interest in the panel and gauge which stakeholders may be a good fit for the group long-term. The liaison panel was able to identify a number of stakeholders that would need to be invited to the working group.

Panel members have home work! Think about goals, objectives and representation. Follow up with the Ranger by email.

Finally Joey Stephenson addressed the group. He requested the following, (1) Fix the road at Kinlock Falls (dangerous conditions); (2) trim the sides of the road at Kinlock and the NW Road; (3) treat the kudzu at Kinlock springs it is coming down to the fall on both sides of the road, at the old CCC camp and in the wilderness. Joey removed 3 bags of trash from Kinlock today.

\*Copies of power point presentations that were shared at the meeting are available by contacting Allison Cochran at the Bankhead office.