

Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel September 29, 2016 Meeting Summary

Agenda

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6:00	Meeting Facilitator Introduction Ground rules review	Andy Scott Research Soil Scientist, USFS
6:05	District Ranger Welcome & Updates	Dave Casey District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	Recreation Working Group	Report Mike Cook ORA, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	<i>Recreation Working Group Process & Timeline</i>	
6:30	<i>Question & Answer on Process</i>	Andy Scott
6:45	<i>Quality Recreation Experiences/Desired Future Conditions</i>	Mike Cook
7:30	<i>Input Round Robin – Quality Recreation Experiences</i>	Andy Scott
7:45	Next Steps (Five Year Strategic Plan and 2017 Implementation)	Dave Casey
8:00	Closeout & Adjourn Next meeting & agenda items Other panel business items	Dave Casey

Ranger Dave Casey provided a few updates. He introduced the new Bankhead Silviculturist, Jason Harris, filling a critical District position. Dave Casey provided updates on staffing and highlighted that the Bankhead is quite short-staffed and looking to fill some positions. The fall fire season is here with very dry conditions. A camp fire closure order will be issued. The Brushy Lake Recreation Area has been salvage logged and the District staff have cleaned up some debris, made some repairs and re-opened the camp ground and day use area. Alabama Power Company is funding the installation of a courtesy pier at Clear Creek next week. Houston and Corinth courtesy piers should be installed by Christmas. We will sign the Houston Longleaf Restoration Project Decision next week. Dave signed the 2016 Forest Health CE for first pine thinning on about 1200 acres today.

Tonight's meeting focuses on the work of the Recreation Working Group. This body is incredibly important to how the Bankhead National Forest and the Liaison Panel function. Dave has nominated the Recreation Working Group for a Regional Forester's award in recognition of all of the time and effort individuals have put into this vitally important effort. Tonight we will have a snapshot of the Rec Working Group's past 6 months and get a window into the process and what we have developed together. The reason for the rec analysis is that what we have now is not fiscally and in some cases environmentally sustainable. Change is inevitable. Dave

wants that change to be intentional and include public desires and good stewardship within the budget constraints and to meet our needs.

Mike Cook provided a power point presentation highlighting the rec working group's progress to date. A copy of the power point is available by calling Allison Cochran at 205-489-5111 or by emailing jacochran at fs.fed.us.

Questions and Answers on the Rec Working Group's Process

Why? Is the FS wanting to bring more recreation and people? The goals and objectives and tasks are described in the power point slide show. The group is describing what we have; where we could go into the future; ideas for marketing more or less opportunities; and work with other groups to develop or manage some opportunities. What's appropriate and where.

Is the FS saying we don't have the budget and will close areas? We do not have the budget to keep all experiences and facilities going right now and this is part of the process... figuring out what role does the Bankhead play in outdoor recreation. What are people coming for and what are we providing? Supply and Demand. Primarily the group is looking at the "big picture" of outdoor recreation. The FS intention is to provide high quality recreation experience for all 12 experiences identified within the resources we have available. There is a possibility that program may be cut. There is also a possibility that some funds could be available to develop new or expand existing opportunities. So if we have an idea of where we want to go (VISION), then we already know how to make critical expansions or reductions. The group identified quality recreation experiences, described those and then conducted a gap analysis. Seven of those experiences were reviewed in detail at tonight's meeting.

At the meeting the following ideas were offered, in addition to what was presented.

Hunting and horse riding are in decline. What would it take to fix that; bring it back; improve?

Develop a system that allows people to log in and tell what kind of activity they are doing.

Rotation system for trails and campgrounds to give areas a time of rest.

Hunting and horse riding are down. Is that within the wilderness or state-wide? Hunting is in decline nationally; there's been a steady decline over time. Horse riders feel there is a great number present.

Rustic camping – Convert Houston and use it.

Native American sacred sites should not be included or disturbed.

Horse riding use – some do not think there is an accurate count of riders because so many people live on the edge and go in groups from other places, so it may not be in decline. Also, there's an annual pass that might be skewing numbers. Questioning if on the fee envelop there is a place to put how many riders?

Registry – in case someone is hurt, they can log in to a system or have some kind of registry.

To increase riders, there could be access to water (Pine Torch).

Have had a log in system for hikers. Consider re-visiting that if needed for safety.

Is there a fee for hiking? Not interested in seeing fees for backpacking/hiking.

Work with the Alabama Hiking Trail Society who want to build a long trail in the state.

Floating – work with the Alabama Scenic River Trail people.

Need opportunities for youth. Any consideration for minorities?

Canoeing on Sipsey – debris is in the way and blocking access. Clean it out for canoes.

Discussion on INFORMATION. More information on recreation is needed across the board. All mediums of information including online (web), print, brochures, etc. The information needs of the public are not being met. We need GOOD online information. A downside of information being available is littering and other vandalism. Kinlock Falls named as a top 10 swimming hole in Southern Living magazine. It is full of litter, drinking and parking issues. Some consider it being overused due to information.

Other items covered at the meeting –

There is a Renew Our Rivers lake clean up on October 6 at Houston.

There is a Game Check workshop/information meeting on October 11 at 6 in Double Springs.

Bankhead staff are mowing roads around the Wilderness.

The Feral Hog Hunt had a low reported harvest, much lower than any past hunts.

Next Steps –

Two more recreation working group meetings are planned this year. We'll be describing what recreation on Bankhead could look like over the next five years and consider implementation ideas like cost and environmental considerations. More public participation and NEPA analysis will come in the future when deciding what to implement.

Ranger Casey announced that he has accepted a new job. Dave is moving in one month and will be the Ranger on the Pisgah NF. Dave wanted to stress that moving forward with the recreation working group and the Bankhead Liaison panel is imperative and that we should let our voices be heard to make sure things continue to move forward. Things will change. Make sure they are the result of good, thoughtful process, information and intention. Make this a priority and keep the momentum.

The following were in attendance –

Forest Service staff including Dave Casey, Andy Scott, Allison Cochran, Mike Cook, Jason Harris.

Bankhead Liaison Panel members including Randy Feltman, James Barnacastle, Chuck Byrd, Lisa Gardner, Anthony Hood, Mark Kolinski, John Howell, Mike Henshaw, James Alexander

Public attendees included Roger Robertson, Marsha Roberston, Mary Grace Robertson, Andy Baril, Karen Hulbert, Kim Waites, Kari Kirby, Howell Kirby, Colmore Christian, Margaret Dunn, Rae Ramsey, Gary White, Edmon Smith, George Hedges, Betsy Dill, Joey Stephenson, Mike Bagwell, Allison Bohlmon, Horace Boyett, Matt Brock, Lois Harper, Paulette Moore, James Creel, Patricia Yeager, Jacky Yeager, Danny Holmes, Ellen Hays, Lewayne Brock, Terry Fry, Kevin England, Elmo Robinson, Johnna Franks, Patricia Alexander, Patsy Grant, James Grant