

**Bankhead National Forest  
Liaison Panel Meeting Summary  
January 21, 2014  
Moulton Recreation Center  
Moulton, Alabama**

**Forest Service Attendees:**

Steve Lohr, Forest Supervisor  
Eric Schmeckpeper, Acting District Ranger  
Mike Cook, ORA  
Tripp Gaskins, District Silviculturist  
Lorenzo Walton, Forester Trainee

**Liaison Panel Members:**

James Alexander  
Mark Kolinski  
Randy Feltman  
La Verne Matheson  
Charles Borden  
Russell Miller  
Matt Brock  
Mike Henshaw  
Anthony Hood  
Russel Miller

**Public Attendees:**

Dr. Dawn Lemke  
Edmon Smith  
John Green  
Andrew Cantrell  
Ali Papp  
Beth Smith  
Hana Glennon  
Dr. Wub Tadesse  
Lisa Gardner  
Mike Bagwell  
Jim Godwin

**Meeting Agenda**

6:00 **Welcome & Ground Rules**

**Eric Schmeckpeper,**  
Acting District Ranger,  
USFS, Bankhead

6:15 **Recreation Project**

**James Alexander**  
**Horse Trail Maintenance**  
**Projects Update** Back  
Country Horsemen of  
Ala.

6:30 **Friends of Clear Creek**

**Beth Smith**  
Camp McDowell

6:45 **Flattened Musk Turtle & Black Warrior**

**Jim Godwin**  
**Waterdog Research**  
**Projects** Alabama Natural  
Heritage Program  
Auburn University

7:15	<b>Alabama A&amp;M University</b> <b>Research Projects Update</b>	<b>Dr. Wub Tadesse, Dr. Dawn Lemke, Lisa Gardner</b> Alabama A&M University
8:00	<b>Forest Supervisor's Address</b>	<b>Steve Lohr</b> Forest Supervisor, USFS, National Forests in Alabama
8:30	<b>Panel Business, Frequency of Meetings Discussion</b>	<b>Eric Schmeckpeper</b> Acting District Ranger, Bankhead
8:45	<b>Closeout</b> <b>Next meeting &amp; agenda items</b> <b>Other panel business items</b>	<b>Eric Schmeckpeper</b> Acting District Ranger, Bankhead

**Acting Ranger Schmeckpeper** opened the meeting with a welcome and by summarizing the Liaison Panel's ground rules.

**James Alexander, Backcountry Horsemen of Alabama**, gave an update on recent projects and stated that the weather and government shutdown had slowed down progress.

**Beth Smith, Camp McDowell**, shared a presentation, Establishment of Grassroots capacity in the Clear Creek Watershed. She talked about the grant from Patagonia to conduct water monitoring in the Clear Creek watershed and teamwork with Alabama Water Watch. Discussed the importance of water quality in the watershed for species such as the rush darter and flattened musk turtle. The goal is to develop a grass root organization to analyze water and assess watershed health in Clear Creek. She is trying to recruit folks to be certified. You can like here Friends of Clear Creek page on Facebook.

There was a question about the amount of acres in Clear Creek and if the headwaters were in the Bankhead National Forest. It appears that the headwaters are just west of the Bankhead.

**Jim Godwin, Alabama Natural Heritage Program, Auburn University** gave a presentation on the Flattened Musk Turtle and Black Warrior Waterdog project on the Bankhead. He stated that the Black Warrior Waterdog is only found in Alabama and that the Bankhead holds about 25-30% of the species population. He stated that the main threat to both species is water quality and that the Bankhead has excellent habitat.

There was a comment about requiring people on Smith Lake to install rip rap that is suitable for the flattened musk turtle. There is concern that the delay in getting adequate rip rap has led to sedimentation into the lake in the past.

**Lisa Gardner, Alabama A&M University** gave an overview of the Center for Forest Ecosystem Assessment. Lisa stated that the primary research goal is the long-term examination of the ecological responses of a forest and its components to a variety of management based silvicultural treatments. Three sub projects:

Sub-Project 1 Forest Community Responses and Dynamics

Sub-Project 2 Forest Ecosystem Functions and Processes

Sub-Project 3 Coupled Dynamics of Humans and Landscapes

**Dr. Dawn Lemke, Alabama A&M University** discussed sub-project 3-Coupled Dynamics of Humans and Landscapes. Dr. Lemke discussed the ongoing biomass and water quality projects on the Bankhead. There was a comment about feral hogs degrading the water quality on the Bankhead.

**Andrew Cantrell, Alabama A&M University** discussed the Flora, Fauna, and Genetic Responses project on the Bankhead. Andrew discussed how different silvicultural practices seem to be affecting different flora and fauna on the Bankhead. Andrew did state that amphibians and reptiles have different reproductive cycles that could influence this study along with other factors such as the increasing population of feral swine. There was a question about the decline of Mississippi salamanders that have shown up in the test sites. Andrew believes that the decline of the Mississippi salamander in the test sites is a population trend and not a result of the silvicultural treatments, because he is also showing a decline in the control sites as well.

**Steve Lohr, Forest Supervisor, National Forests in Alabama.** Steve discussed the current ranger vacancy. He stated that he has conducted interviews and expects to have a ranger hired soon. He expects the new ranger to report for duty in March (Note – David Casey was selected and will be reporting on March 31, 2014). Steve also addressed some of the other vacancies around the Forest. Steve discussed the BLM oil and gas lease on the Bankhead. He stated that he had signed the consent to lease today. He said that this has happened on the Bankhead in the past and that in the past, drilling never occurred. There were questions about the Forest Plan as it pertains to mineral rights. Steve said that if they do decide to drill on the Bankhead then the District would have to proceed with NEPA. Other questions asked about the terms of the lease and why BLM had backed off of the Talladega-all of which the Forest Service is unsure of.

There was a question about Hightown Path and why it was not protected in the Forest Plan. Steve mentioned that this topic could be covered at a later date.

**Acting Ranger Eric Schmeckpeper** began closeout with a question to the panel members about the frequency of meetings. The panel members opted to keep the schedule of quarterly meetings with locations alternating between Moulton and Double Springs. Meetings in

Moulton will be on the first Tuesday of January and July while meetings in Double Springs will be on the first Thursday of April and October (meetings would be adjusted to avoid holidays and known conflicts). Eric also mentioned that the Bankhead is now in the prescribed fire season and that Compartment 131 Thinning Project CE was out for its 30 day comment period.

There was one question asking to have a topic at the next meeting addressing the issue with feral swine on the Bankhead.

The proposed meeting schedule for the next 12 months is:

April 10, 2014 in Double Springs

July 1, 2014 in Moulton

October 2, 2014 in Double Springs

January 6, 2015 in Moulton

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