

Bankhead National Forest (BNF) Liaison Panel Meeting Minutes

April 10, 2014

**Bankhead National Forest
Liaison Panel
Meeting Agenda
First National Bank
Double Springs, Alabama
April 10, 2014**

6:00	District Ranger Welcome, Introductions & Address	Dave Casey District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	Welcome & Ground Rules	Andy Scott, Moderator Research Soil Scientist, Southern Research Station, USFS, Alabama A&M University
6:30	Feral Swine Research Projects Update	Dr. Wes Stone & Patience Knight Professor & Student, Alabama A&M University
6:45	Feral Swine Management in Alabama	Dana Johnson Wildlife Biologist, USDA APHIS,

7:15	Feral Swine Program on Bankhead NF & Black Warrior WMA	Allison Cochran, Travis McDonald & Matt Brock Wildlife Biologists, USFS & ADCNR-WFF, Bankhead & Black Warrior
7:45	Question & Answer	Andy Scott, Moderator
8:00	Closeout Next meeting & agenda items Other panel business items	Andy Scott, Moderator

Meeting Notes

BNF Ranger Dave Casey welcomed the panel to order

- Introduced himself
- Two weeks on job
- From NC, primarily worked in timber and silviculture

Panel members introduced themselves

- Mark Kolinski Alabama Program Manager, WildSouth
- James Alexander Backcountry Horsemen of Alabama
- Mike Henshaw ACES, Winston County
- Russell Miller Jasper Lumber Co
- Randy Feltman Logger, Local resident, recreation user
- LaVerne Matheson Smith Lake Advocacy
- Anthony Hood recreation user (hog hunter), youth, hiking, etc
- Matt Brock ADCNR-WFF

Panel members absent

- Chuck Byrd TNC
- Shannon Holbrook FWS
- Charles Borden Local resident, recreation user
- Jody Buttram Horse rider – Resigning, Notified by email today. We'll need to address in Closeout.
- David Cummings Winston County Commissioner
- Daryl Lawson Alabama A&M

Ranger Dave Casey

- Introduced Dr. Andy Scott, Research Soil Scientist with the USFS-Southern Research Station, as meeting moderator.

Andy Scott

- Went over ground rules for the meeting
- Meeting objectives – Update on feral swine control and research on BNF and in Alabama; identify concerns and frame the problem regarding feral swine
- Introduced NFAL Supervisor Steve Lohr, who had an unplanned announcement

Steve Lohr

- Announced he has accepted a new position within the Washington Office with a June 1 reporting date
- Announced that no oil and gas leases were expected on the BNF in 2014
 - Mark Kolinski inquired as to if it was a Regional Forester decision
 - Steve clarified it was a Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management decision

Andy Scott

- Introduced first agenda speaker, Dr. William (Wes) Stone and Patience Knight

Dr. Stone

- Discussed two previous projects examining feral swine gut contents to determine food sources
 - Primarily vegetative
 - Included mammals and ground nesting birds
- Introduced graduate students Patience Knight and Anna Campos
 - Anna will be working on reproductive factors of feral swine
 - Patience will be studying effects of prescribed fire on hog activity

Patience Knight

- Gave a brief overview of the worldwide feral swine issue
- Impact of forest management on hog habitat is largely unknown, especially prescribed fire
- Will study hog sign on sites burned as part of 3 yr burn program or control areas
- Figure-8 transects before and after burns and in burned and control stands
 - Stream areas
- Q from Mark Kolinski: What is the size of each transect?
 - 20-30 acre stands
 - 1370m total transects with 20 m on each side
- Q from audience, Hank Byrnes: Could drones be used to monitor hogs?
 - Money not available for drones, low visibility and ability to fly under canopy
- Q from Mark Kolinski: Will damage be assessed?
 - Yes

Andy Scott

- Introduced Dana Johnson, Wildlife Biologist with USDA APHIS Animal Services

Dana Johnson

- Discussed a variety of statewide efforts and personal experience with research and application of what works and what doesn't work regarding feral swine control
- Hogs have to be trained to go to trap, which is completely unlike trapping for furbearers
- Fort Rucker feral swine control program
 - Changed program when Wildlife Services became involved
 - Was using volunteers on a 30,000 acre area
 - Volunteers weren't vested
 - 5 of 60 volunteers did it correctly
 - Volunteers would catch 1 pig and leave instead of wait for sounder (Sounder is large extended family group)
 - Requires 8 hours/day, 5 days/week, serious work
 - Wildlife Services started targeting smaller areas to achieve control before moving on
- Oakmulgee Ranger District, Talladega National Forest
 - Currently "shotgun" approach to feral swine control
 - Changing to "rifle" approach of targeting smaller (5,000 acres) areas
 - Find groups with cameras then start trapping. ID pigs, work them down to A site and then catch them.
 - Notes - hog home range – 1000-2000 acres; shotgun approach on 80,000 acres isn't effective.
 - Seeing pig sign doesn't mean there are pigs there or that they may be back soon.
 - Good trapping time, hot and dry = August.
- Various control methods that don't/won't work
 - Sodium nitrite (used in Australia)
 - Kills pigs in 30 min
 - Too many non-target species would be affected (raccoons, bears)
 - Contraceptives
 - Studied at Auburn
 - Has never worked as control in other species
 - Could lower reproduction to help trapping effort
 - Will take >5 years
 - Delivery mechanism isn't developed
 - Continuous catch doors on traps
 - Don't work
 - Hogs don't get trap-shy, they get pressure-shy
 - Don't shoot (and miss) any hogs near traps
 - Dogs don't run pigs off
 - Too big of home range
 - Simply go to thickest area
 - Reduce or tighten up their home range
- Diseases
 - Hog cholera
 - None in Alabama
 - Pseudorabies
 - Dogs can get it

- 70% of hogs tested in South Alabama were positive for pseudorabies
 - Swine brucellosis
 - Bacteria on 50% of feral swine
 - Lasts a few hours
 - Flu symptoms
 - Found in reproductive system; clean from head; always wear gloves
- International Wild Pig Conference April 14-16
- Alabama Hog Task Force
 - All pertinent state agencies represented, Alfa, etc
 - Feral swine problems throughout the state
 - Research
 - How to stop relocation
 - Track pig problems through the state
- Q from Mark Kolinski: What would a hog population density study entail?
 - Studies 5000-6000 acre areas to find sounders
 - 1 bait bucket with camera per ~250 acres
 - More in bottoms, less on ridges
 - So, 20 cameras per 5000 acres
 - On Ft Benning, 46,000 acres, 12 sounders were identified
- Q from Mike Henshaw: So what about 25,000 acre Sipsey Wilderness?
 - Focus on edges given home range size of hogs
 - Bound by regulations and access issues
- General discussion
 - Trap construction
 - Minimum Requirements Analysis for Sipsey Wilderness
 - Vandalism of traps
 - Game animals. Discussion on having status changed to nuisance wildlife.

Allison Cochran, Travis McDonald and Matt Brock presented BNF and Black Warrior WMA Feral Swine Control Program

- Swine present since 1980s, increasing damage reports starting in mid 2000s
- Strongholds in Flint Creek, Bear Creek and Black Warrior Zone A north of Caney
- 2005 held Partners Meeting
 - APHIS, ADCNR, Forest Service, Auburn, Alabama A&M, ACES
 - Agreed to try all techniques with known success
 - Trapping
 - Education
 - Enforcement
 - Special hunting season on WMA
- Interagency Agreement 2005-2015
 - Scouting, trap construction and trapping, shooting
 - Future efforts based on success or failure
- Education & Enforcement

- Media, brochures, hunter education
- Open season on BNF
 - Regulated season on WMA
 - Hunting over bait illegal anywhere
 - Illegal to hunt at night
- Private lands
 - Permits available for night hunting or dog hunting
- Methods
 - 14 functional traps
 - Pre-baiting to determine activity
 - Cameras
 - Box traps and corral traps
- Results 2005-2010
 - ~30 pigs per year
- Results 2010-present
 - 2011 ~40
 - 2012 - 112
 - 2013 - 157
 - 2014 - 36 so far
 - Hunting, additional numbers removed
- Challenges
 - What is objective? What is success & how to measure?
 - Baiting/trapping during other hunting seasons
 - Size and terrain of BNF, Sipsev Wilderness
 - Relatively small population, large home range, highly mobile
 - Areas not staying hog-free, Continuing to catch hogs in the same areas
 - Enforcement
 - Releasing, trapping, vandalism
- Wilderness
 - Challenges
 - Access
 - Effort much greater, take away from current efforts
 - Conflicts with other users
 - Disposal and/or removal
 - Minimum Requirements Analysis
 - Resources at risk in Wilderness are also at risk in other areas where effort is concentrated

Open questions

- Questions from Mark Kolinski
 - Use cameras during pre-baiting? Yes (MB/TM)
 - Wait up to 2 weeks for sounder to enter trap? Yes, one day to several weeks possible. (MB/TM)
 - Best success? Dictated by animals, not time. Days to weeks (DJ)
 - Not trap-shy? No, pressure sensitive. Avoid non-lethal pressure (DJ, MB)
 - Disposal? Designated areas, buried or predators (MB/TM)
- Comment from Laverne Matheson

- Rendering plant might take carcasses
- Comment/question from audience: What will they do to change hogs in wilderness, we need to make something happen.
 - Mark Kolinski: need population density study, bait buckets and cameras needed for minimum requirements analysis
 - Steve Lohr: Forest is not resisting performing a MRA, but need to evaluate whole Bankhead
 - Matt Brock: Fawn recruitment study ongoing will likely give us some of the data needed
- Question: What is overall plan?
 - Eliminating vs control? Eradication is not realistic. Control and minimize damage. Goal to be most efficient.
- Question: What about reintroducing extirpated predators?
 - Any predator able to control hogs would have unintended consequences on other animals and domestic livestock
- Question: When will area be saturated? Wilderness?
 - Anecdotal reports of dogs attacked, why are they moving toward Moreland?
 - Naturally expanding range
- Comment from Randy Feltman: One reaction causes another; designating wilderness messed up timber, now we have a hog factory. Take all uses into consideration before acting
- Question: Is Sipsey truly the problem?
- Question: Chances we can add special WMA hunts?
 - Success rate was high (87-150 hogs removed in special hunt) due to small window
 - Change regulations on firearms allowed
- Comment: Hogs are clearly a problem, who has authority to redesignate as nuisance animals?
 - Conservation Advisory Board, May 3 Board meeting
 - Discussion about BLP suggesting to board that hogs be reclassified
 - Other agency reps aren't present, may be conflicts in suggestions to the CAB
 - Citizens/groups/individuals can petition board
 - NFS suggests changes to board frequently
 - Not consensus that redesignating, removing game status, would solve the problem
 - If they were designated as nuisance, that would still not allow the public to shoot at night on National Forest lands.
- Comment Ryan Shurette: This is an unfortunate ecological event, like rock doves and European Starlings. Feral swine are present across the south and much work is being done in areas with little success, for example on islands. Even if swine reclassified as non-game or nuisance, that won't effect what is done on public land and it's not going to make or break the problem at this point.
- Wrap up: Dave Casey
 - Define problem, continue to work with partners
 - Question: So the purpose of this meeting was that things will just continue as is?
 - Dave: Bad timing, Sipsey vs. Forest as a whole, study entire issue objectively, look at all options
 - Mark Kolinski: need more discussion on next panel meeting, more panel meetings
 - Potentially create working group of highly interested members?

- Next Panel Meeting July 1 in Moulton