

Bankhead National Forest
Liaison Panel Meeting Summary
July 1, 2014
First National Bank
Moulton, Alabama

Forest Service Attendees:

Dave Casey, District Ranger
Mike Cook, ORA
Tripp Gaskins, Silviculturist
Allison Cochran, Wildlife Biologist

Liaison Panel Members:

James Alexander
Mark Kolinski
Anthony Hood
John Howell
Matt Brock
Charles Borden

Public Attendees:

Mike Bagwell	Patricia Alexander
James Grant	Donald Jones
Janice Barrett	Morgan Pennington
Mindi	

Meeting Agenda

6:00	District Ranger Welcome & Ground Rules	Dave Casey District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	Shortleaf Pine Initiative – NFWF Grant Project	Tripp Gaskins, Silviculturist, USFS, Bankhead
6:30	Greater Collier Watershed EA Status Update	Dave Casey District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:45	Feral Swine Working Group Report	Allison Cochran Wildlife Biologist, USFS, Bankhead

7:00	Restoration Monitoring Tour Report	Mark Kolinski Wild South
7:30	Forest Plan Amendment – Indiana Bat	Allison Cochran Wildlife Biologist, USFS, Bankhead
7:45	Horse Trail Projects Update	Mike Cook ORA, USFS, Bankhead
8:00	Houston Recreation Area	Mike Cook, ORA, USFS, Bankhead
8:15	Closeout Next meeting & agenda items Other panel business items	Dave Casey, District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead

Ranger Casey opened the meeting with a welcome and by summarizing the Liaison Panel’s ground rules.

Silviculturist Tripp Gaskins shared a power point presentation on the Bankhead’s Shortleaf Woodland Restoration and Maintenance Project. The project was awarded a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and International Paper, as part of the Forestland Stewards Initiative. A \$100,000 grant was awarded to Bankhead last year for shortleaf restoration efforts and a public demonstration area. Implementation has begun on the grant and associated projects. The focus is in Area 2, Bankhead’s Shortleaf Emphasis Area. The majority of the projects associated with the grant were identified in the Grindstone, Mill, Inman and Greater Collier Environmental Assessments. Grant monies will be used for midstory removal, precommercial thinnings, timber marking supplies, contract/seasonal prescribed burning resources, helicopter flight time for prescribed burning, and public outreach. Accomplishments on the project to date (Fiscal Year 2014) include 6100 acres prescribed burned, 818 acres prepared for timber sale, 75 acres of non-native invasive plants treated. Additionally, 164 acres of midstory removal, 35 acres of site preparation for planting shortleaf, and 100 acres of non-native invasive plant treatments have been awarded under contract and will be completed this summer. Public outreach activities have included a field day for area students at the Payne Outdoor Classroom and a field trip of the Winston County Natural Resources Council. See power point presentation for additional information.

There was a question about the acres of shortleaf pine regeneration in the project and whether the recent timber sales were included in the grant project? Yes, the recent sales in Inmanfield area are part of the project. It is anticipated that 400 acres of shortleaf pine regeneration will be prepared through this project. However, all of it may not be sold by the grant project’s end in FY 2015.

Ranger Casey gave an update on the Greater Collier Environmental Assessment. Ranger Casey recognized the great amount of work that has gone into the preparation of the Greater Collier EA. He shared with the Panel that there has been a change in the NEPA process and we now have a new objection period rather than an appeal period. The objection period for the Greater Collier EA has ended and there were no objections. However, Ranger Casey is not signing the decision at this time because we are not finished with our archaeological surveys. We expect to sign the decision in January after all archaeological surveys are complete

and we are sure we won't impact any cultural resources. Project layout is moving forward. Archaeological surveys will be complete before any ground disturbing activities take place.

Wildlife Biologist Allison Cochran gave an update on the meeting of the feral swine working group. Minutes from the first meeting of the working group were provided and will be available on the Bankhead website. A group of 12 people met on May 7. The Ranger's goal for the working group is to look at the big picture of feral swine problems and take an all lands approach to reducing damage. There was much discussion at the working group on a few topics; wilderness, classification of swine as game, and use of volunteers. Next steps and progress to date were reviewed. Next steps document was provided and will be available on the Bankhead website.

Charles Borden commented on the Wilderness and expressed that Wilderness should be a primary focus because of the values in the wilderness. Charles also shared that feral swine are moving to the east side of Bankhead and asked about distances traveled. Matt Brock updated that we have taken 158 feral swine to date this year through trapping and shooting. Mark Kolinski shared that there was a lengthy discussion on Wilderness at the working group meeting. Mark wants to see a population density study done on Bankhead and thinks Alabama A&M should focus their research efforts on that. He also mentioned that there's a population of swine in Mattox Creek drainage that have been there for years. He suspects this is the group doing damage at the Gum Pond cemetery. Mark expressed that he thinks a damage assessment is not needed and won't be useful. Dave Casey thinks damage survey is worthwhile and that a population study may be out of the District's means. Additionally, we are hoping that fawn recruitment study on Black Warrior WMA may be useful in helping estimate the pig population.

Mark Kolinski gave a report on the May 28 Restoration Monitoring Working Group's field trip. The group visited Compartment 127, Stand 22 Mile Creek Shortleaf, Compartment 45, Stand 2 Hurricane Hardwood Release, Compartment 124, Stand 16 Payne Loblolly Thinning and Compartment 21, Stand 1 Holmes Chapel Shortleaf. There was discussion on hardwood forest and hardwood woodland desired future condition and burning rotations regarding the Comp 45 stand. There is a request for discussion on burning rotations in Area 1 and hardwood dfc's. Refer to the power point presentation Mark Kolinski shared for more details on the Restoration Monitoring Working Group's report.

Ranger Dave Casey asked if the Prescribed Burning Environmental Assessment had been shared with the Panel? It was presented to the panel and is included in meeting minutes on the Bankhead website. Dave suggested that the Bankhead staff overlay the silvicultural treatments and prescribed burn maps and share that with the panel. There was a recommendation that before changing burn units, the staff should review the dfc's. Matt Brock had a question about sprouting and hardwood competition and why site prep didn't include the use of herbicides? Herbicide site prep is included in the Greater Collier EA. There are 35 acres of shortleaf pine site prep by herbicide in the GMI EA that is currently under contract. This will be our first herbicide site prep on Bankhead. Charles Borden shared that science is not precise on how things will react so the purpose of monitoring is to better inform future plans. Some dfc's may change as they might not be practical. The monitoring working group will add new monitoring plots associated with herbicide site prep treatments. Charles Borden also requested an update on the effects to wildlife. Mark Kolinski shared that at the last meetings Alabama A&M University had provided these updates. Matt Brock shared that he could provide an update on deer harvest since implementation of QDM on Zone B. Wildlife monitoring updates will continue to be shared at future panel meetings.

Wildlife Biologist Allison Cochran shared a National Forests in Alabama proposal to amend the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) with regard to Indiana Bat Standards. Ryan Shurette, Forest Biologist in the Supervisor's Office in Montgomery, is beginning public scoping of this proposal to amend the Forest Plan. Interested participants should contact Ryan with input or questions. A scoping letter highlighting the proposal is forthcoming and will be posted to the National Forests in Alabama's website. It is expected that

an Environmental Assessment will be prepared with regards to this Forest Plan revision. Indiana bats were known to hibernate in two caves on Bankhead when the Forest Plan was written in 2004. There are nineteen Forest Plan standards that address bats. Those have been applicable to Bankhead. Since that time, in 2012, Indiana bats were documented on the Talladega National Forest, Shoal Creek District, during the maternity roost period (spring). A Forest Plan revision is needed to better focus management efforts where they are needed and to ensure Districts have the abilities to meet upland ecosystem restoration objectives, while still providing adequate Indiana bat (and associated bat species) habitats. Specifically, the proposal includes amending or revising standards related to leave tree retention during regeneration harvests, upland water sources, and growing season prescribed burning. Anyone interested in participating in the public scoping process should contact Ryan Shurette, 334-241-8143, within the next month.

Mark Kolinski asked how prescribed burning will change related to these amendments. Allison answered the proposal will allow for year round burning during any month of the year, where needed for upland restoration efforts, particularly for red-cockaded woodpecker management. There was discussion on the use of loblolly pine and other snags for maternity roosts in the south, as opposed to large living hardwood roosts typically used in the midwest. Anthony Hood asked about white-nose syndrome on Bankhead. Allison updated the group that white-nose syndrome has been confirmed in both endangered bat hibernacula on Bankhead this winter. Large-scale mortality has not been observed. Monitoring will continue.

Other Resources Assistant Mike Cook gave a recreation update. Mike shared a power point presentation that included updates on horse trail projects and the Houston Recreation Area. Horse trail projects are underway to improve the visitor experience while protecting aquatic resources. Two bridges are under contract to be installed to save crossing location and improve the crossing. One bridge was installed by Trails Unlimited in winter. The second bridge will be installed in August or September. Volunteers with Backcountry Horsemen completed work to improve trail sections after the first bridge was installed, including placing gravel to harden sections of trail. Mike shared that we have secured special funds to address drainage issues and erosion issues. This is a direct result and benefit of the Trails Assessment which laid the foundation for project work. Approximately \$100,000 of Legacy Trails funds have been secured. Approximately \$30,000 of stewardship retained receipts have been secured through the Rush-Brushy Watershed Restoration Action Plan and the Rush-Brushy Stewardship Proposal. These special funds will be used for trail maintenance to and to improve erosion problems. A contract is out for bid on this project now. Work is expected to begin this year on the Key Mill Loop. It is expected that this contract work will better prepare us for annual maintenance.

There was a discussion on the bluff section of trail. Mike shared that the contract will try to work on that section with heavy equipment, but if not able to complete it, then we have an option to work on the section by hand with a trail maintenance crew. We are also considering a re-route above the bluff (Johnny's Ranch section). Discussion is that the area is ecologically sensitive area and that working on that section is thought to be a wasted effort by some. There was discussion on how tall the bluff is and does it fall in rare community/bluff Forest Plan prescription and what that allows. Staff will check on that, but didn't think it was tall enough to be included in the rare community prescription and bluff standards would not apply. Generally, existing trails, roads, structures, openings, etc within a rare community or riparian area may be maintained, but new ones would not be created. If recreational activities are negatively affecting a rare community, sites may be modified to reduce or eliminate negative effects. It is already a designated trail, so the idea at this time is to fix the damage and maintain the trail. Staff will look at Forest Plan prescription.

Mike Cook shared information on the status of the Houston Rec Area. The Houston Day Use Area is open in time for the Independence Day holiday. Houston Campground is closed. There is a strong local use and interest in the Houston Rec Area. Houston is being evaluated as there are reduced maintenance and recreation budgets and it is an older area that does not meet current standards. Houston Day Use Area will be open through the Labor Day holiday. The boat ramp is open year round.

There was a question about hiking trails around Houston. There is a one-way trail along Smith Lake at Houston

There was a comment that recreation impacts at Kinlock Falls are getting worse every year. Trash and littering are considered a major concern with trash getting into the stream. It was suggested that the Forest needs more funding for Law Enforcement presence and that a trash can at the site would be a great improvement. A wooden desk has been dumped there and needs picking up.

There was a question if there are any plans to put up new kiosks at Gum Pond and Braziel trailheads. Funding is secured to put up new Wilderness Kiosks as part of the 50th Wilderness Celebrations. Wild South volunteered to install the kiosks. It was suggested to consider flammability in the design.

The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, October 2 in Double Springs. Meeting topic suggestions include horse trail update, wilderness presentation, and wildlife effects from silvicultural treatments. A National Forests in Alabama 50th Wilderness Celebration is planned for September 6.

Please contact Allison Cochran at the Bankhead National Forest at 205-489-5111 or bkinfo@fs.fed.us for copies of power point presentations.