

Decision Memo

**TSI Hand-tool Release and Pre-Commercial Thinning
USDA, Forest Service
Shoal Creek Ranger District
Cleburne, Calhoun, and Clay Counties, Alabama**

Decision

It is my decision to implement the following TSI hand-tool release project to improve longleaf pine stand conditions on the Shoal Creek Ranger District-Talladega National Forest on approximately 105 acres. In addition, 52 acres of pre-commercial thinning will be implemented.

The locations of the indicated actions may occur as follows:

<u>Compartment</u>	<u>Stand</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Compartment</u>	<u>Stand</u>	<u>Acres</u>
22	5	47	46	22	8
50	6	10	53	18	40
66	39	32	66	40	11
66	54	9			

The purpose of this project is to move the stands toward their desired future conditions as identified by the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The desired future condition for these longleaf / shortleaf stands is mature pine overstory with a park like understory of grasses and herbaceous species. These stands are approximately 15 years old or less. These release and thinning treatments will aid in the development of the desired future condition by reducing competition and allowing the available nutrients to be focused on the desired species for growth. This will not only enable the trees to be less stressed but also provide future RCW habitat sooner than if these stands were left untreated.

The project area is managed under Management Prescription 7.E.2, Dispersed Recreation with Vegetation Management, 8.D.1, Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Management Areas, and 9.D.1, Southern Ridge and Valley Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance, as outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The emphasis in 7.E.2 is to manage areas to provide a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities, improve the settings for outdoor recreation, and enhance visitor experiences, in a manner that protects and restores the health, and diversity of the land. The emphasis in 8.D.1 is to provide suitable to optimal habitat conditions in areas containing small RCW populations in a larger designated habitat management area. The emphasis in 9.D.1 is to restore and maintain mountain longleaf pine and associated native forest communities.

The proposed treatment for this TSI hand-tool release is described here. The project will release the longleaf pines from competition by removing off-site pine species and hardwoods less than 5-inches DBH in longleaf plantations. All trees to be cut will be felled using a brush saw or brush axe or other applicable non-ground disturbing methods. No dogwood or blackjack oak will be cut. Neither herbicides nor heavy mechanical equipment will be used and there will be no timber sale involved in this project. The pre-commercial thinning will involve cutting off-site stems, diseased

and deformed stems, and promoting an appropriate spacing to allow for improved growth and health of longleaf / shortleaf pine. These trees will also be cut by hand, using chainsaws or other applicable tools.

Rationale for the Decision

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA because it is consistent with the following categories from Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2007-1, dated 02/15/2007:

Section 31.2 (6) - Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction (Service level D, FSH 7709.56).

I find that this project is appropriate for categorical exclusion within this category because no extraordinary circumstances exist and defined in FSH 1909.15, 30.3.2.

Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

– The project area has been surveyed for threatened, endangered or sensitive plants and animals (TES). The biological evaluation for the TSI hand-tool release and pre-commercial thinning was completed and the determination was “No Effect” on T & E species requiring no further consultation, and “No Impact” on Sensitive species.

Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds. – The proposed action is not in a floodplain, wetland, or municipal watershed, and forest plan standards are implemented to prevent off site impacts.

Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas. – No congressionally designated areas are within the project area.

Inventoried roadless areas. – No part of the project area is designated as inventoried roadless or research natural area.

American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites or Archeological sites, or historic properties or areas. – This project will be accomplished with hand tools and is not ground disturbing. Therefore, the proposed treatments will have no impact on significant cultural resources.

Mitigation measures in the RLRMP will be followed.

Public Involvement and Analysis

A public scoping notice for this project was published in the Anniston Star on April 25, 2008. Additionally, a letter notifying interested parties about the project was mailed to the District mailing list on April 25, 2008. One positive comment in support of the project was received.

Findings Required by Other Law

My decision is based on an analysis of the situation and this action is consistent with the RLRMP, Goals and Objectives (pp. 2-1 through 2-72) including, but not limited to: Goal 12, Objective 12.3. This action also complies with the state-approved Best Management Practices, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and with the seven requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 (b). I have also determined that this action is consistent with the intent and requirements of the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and the National Forest Management Act.

Implementation

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately upon publication of the Notice of Decision in the paper of record (*Anniston Star*).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to comment or appeal pursuant to 36 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 215.12 and may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For further information, contact Kimberly Bittle, Shoal Creek Ranger District, 45 Highway 281, Heflin, AL or at (256) 463-2272.

/s/ Kimberly Bittle

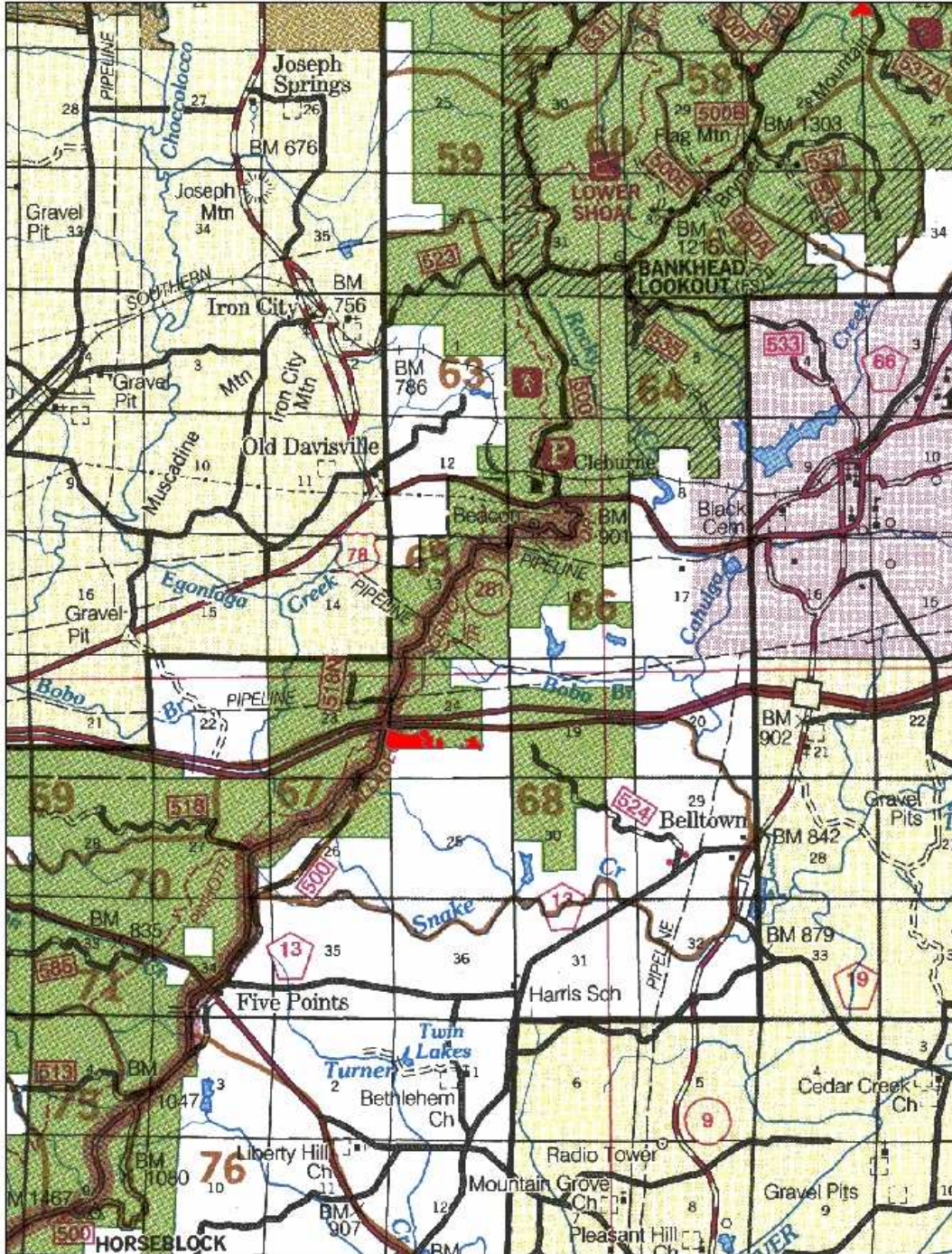
KIMBERLY BITTLE
District Ranger

09/15/2008

Date

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Vicinity Map of TSI / PCT Areas



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