

Decision Memo
Site Preparation and Planting
FY 2007 - 2008

USDA Forest Service
Bankhead National Forest
Bankhead Ranger District
Winston County, Alabama

Decision and Rationale for the Decision

I have decided to proceed with the proposal to perform site preparation followed by the artificial regeneration (planting) of longleaf pine seedlings, on 88 acres, located in Section 4, T12S, R7W; Section 24, T11S, R8W; Section 32, T10S, R7W, Section 31, T10S, R7W. My decision is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk specifically as it relates to biological effects. There is a need to perform site preparation activities to prepare these areas for planting. The methods by which the site preparation will be accomplished include roller drum chopping and prescribed burning. The project is proposed to be implemented during fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

The purpose of this project is to move these stands toward the desired future condition of native longleaf pine woodland ecosystems. The project areas are loblolly pine stands in need of regeneration after having been affected by southern pine beetle. The areas currently consist of standing as well as down and dead trees.

This project will accomplish the goals and objectives of the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan by promoting the restoration of upland forest communities native to the Cumberland Plateau Region. The project areas are managed under Prescription 9.C.3. (Southern Cumberland Plateau Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance) as outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Alabama. These particular prescriptions emphasize managing forestland to maintain "...pine (...longleaf)...forest communities based on historic conditions" ([RLRMP](#)) where thinning can be used to accomplish the management objectives. This project will facilitate the restoration to the desired condition of longleaf pine woodlands as determined by the Forest Health and Restoration Project ([FHRP](#)).

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or EA because it is consistent with the following category from Forest Service Handbook 1909.15-2004-3, dated 07/06/2004:

Section 31.2 (5) – "Regeneration of an area to native trees species, including site preparation which does not involve the use of herbicides or result in vegetation type conversion."

I find that this project is appropriate for categorical exclusion within these categories because no extraordinary circumstances exist as 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 ([BE](#)) 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 area or research natural area.

American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites or other archaeological sites, historic properties or areas. – A cultural resource survey has been conducted on the project area and reports were sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer who concurred with the findings. Since the road corridor is located in a previously disturbed area, no sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places will be affected by the activity.

Mitigation measures that are listed in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan of the National Forests in Alabama ([RLRMP](#)) as well as those listed in the [Forest Health and Restoration Project](#) (pp 48-51) will be followed.

Public Involvement

A legal notice of formal notice and comment period being established for this project was published in *The Northwest Alabamian* on April 11, 2007. Three comments were received and all of the comments that were specific to this proposal were supportive.

Findings Required By Other Laws and Regulations

The project follows Forest-Wide Goals and Objectives listed in the Plan (pp. 2-9 through 2-60) including, but not limited to: Goal 1, Objective 1.3; Forest Wide Standards and Guides FW-9, 10, 12-15, and 17. Management Area Direction, state-approved Best Management Practices would be implemented and the actions would comply with the Clean Water Act, 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 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 (*Northwest Alabamian*).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Pursuant to the 1993 version of 36 CFR 215.4 (as modified by 65 Fed. Reg. 61302), this decision is not subject to appeal.

Contact Person

For further information, contact Glen Gaines, Bankhead National Forest, PO Box 278, Double Springs, AL or at (205) 489-5111.

/s/ Glen D. Gaines
GLEN D. GAINES
District Ranger

6/6/07
Date