

**Decision Memo**  
**Precommercial Thinning**  
**FY 2007 - 2009**

**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 precommercially thin 170 acres of shortleaf pine and 25 acres of loblolly pine with a desired future condition of longleaf pine. 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. Currently, these stands are overstocked and competing with other vegetation for moisture, light and nutrients resulting in reduced vigor. The project areas are located in several different areas across the Bankhead National Forest: Sections 19 and 30, T9S, R6W; Sections 9, 10, 24, 2 and 36, T9S, R7W; Section 36, T9S, R8W; Sections 30, T11S, R7W. The project is proposed to be implemented from fiscal year 2007 to 2009.

The purpose of this project is to move these stands toward the desired future condition of shortleaf and longleaf pine woodlands. This project will promote healthy stands by reducing the stocking level, increasing the vigor and thereby decreasing the risk of insect and disease infestations. The thinning of the immature pine will be accomplished by using handtools such as chainsaws, brush saws, machetes or loppers.

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 Prescriptions 7.E.2 (Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management) and 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 (...shortleaf and 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 shortleaf and 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 (6) – "Timber stand improvements which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction" and*

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.* – The project areas are not within any heritage special study areas and no ground disturbance will occur during project activities. Therefore, no significant heritage sites will be impacted.

Mitigation measures that are listed in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan of the National Forests in Alabama ([RLRMP](#)) 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. Seven comments were received and all of the comments that were specific to this proposal were supportive. Although we did receive a comment that discussed at length the legality of the use of the Categorical Exclusion for these type actions, there were no comments specific to this proposal and the respondent raised no significant issues. The respondent also addressed the lack of detail within the project description. Further information can be obtained by contacting the district office.

### **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 and 1.4. 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

June 11, 2007  
Date