

DECISION MEMO

Wildlife Habitat Improvement & Fuels Reduction Project Midstory Removal FY 2007

USDA, Forest Service
Bankhead National Forest - National Forests in Alabama
Winston County, Alabama

Decision

I have decided to conduct a wildlife habitat improvement and fuels reduction project on approximately 47 acres. Two areas are proposed for treatment. The area in Compartment 19, Stand 3 (C19) is located in Section 11, Township 9 South, Range 7 West on the Bankhead National Forest. The C19 site is located in Area 2 as described in the Forest Health and Restoration Project, National Forests in Alabama, Bankhead National Forest ([FHRP](#)). It is within the Black Warrior Wildlife Management Area. The area in Compartment 163, stands 30 and 39 (C163) is located in Section 28, Township 11 South, Range 8 West on the Bankhead. The C163 site is located in Area 3 as described in the FHRP ([FHRP](#)).

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](#)) and as described in the FHRP ([FHRP](#)). The desired condition for the C19 site is shortleaf pine woodlands. The desired condition for the C163 site is upland oak-hickory forest. These stands are currently loblolly pine stands, ages 26 and 36. They were thinned in 2006 and 2005, respectively. This midstory removal treatment will improve wildlife and native plant habitat, aid in restoration of desired future conditions, and reduce fuel loading within the stands.

The project area in C19 is managed under Management Prescription 7.E.2, Dispersed Recreation Areas with Vegetation Management, as outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan ([RLRMP](#)). The emphasis in 7.E.2 is to managed areas to provide a variety of disperse 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 project area in C163 is managed under Management Prescription 9.C.3, Southern Cumberland Plateau Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance as outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan ([RLRMP](#)). The emphasis in 9.C.3 is to manage the area to maintain or move towards restoration of a mix of hardwood, hardwood-pine and pine (including shortleaf and longleaf) forest communities based on historic conditions.

The proposed treatment for this midstory removal project is described here. In C19, midstory and understory vegetation will be removed. Selected shortleaf pine and dogwood will be retained in the midstory. In C163, oaks, hickories, cherries, persimmon and dogwoods in the midstory will be released from competition by removing remaining midstory and understory vegetation. Midstory removal will be accomplished with hand tools, such as chainsaws and loppers. Heavy mechanical equipment will not be used. Herbicides will not be used.

Rational 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 1909.15-2004-3, dated 07/06/2004:

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).

I find that this project is appropriate for categorical exclusion within this category 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 for the midstory treatment (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 Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas. – A cultural resource assessment was conducted on the project area as a part of the Forest Health and Restoration Project’s thinning in Compartments 163 and 164 timber sale and Compartment 18, 19, and 23 timber sale. The 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 Northwest Alabamian on November 18, 2006. Additionally, a letter notifying interested parties about the project was mailed to the District mailing list on November 14. Two supportive comments were received. A legal advertisement establishing formal notice and comment period was published in the Northwest Alabamian on January 27, 2007. Additionally, a letter notifying interested parties of the formal comment period was mailed to the District mailing list on January 24. Two additional comments were received from individuals in support of the projects.

Findings Required by Other Law

National Forest Management Act - My decision is based on an analysis of the situation and this action is consistent with the [RLRMP](#), Goals and Objectives (pp. 2-35 though 2-39) including, but not limited to: Goal 13, Objective 13.1 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 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 (*Northwest Alabamian*).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12, 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

Bankhead National Forest

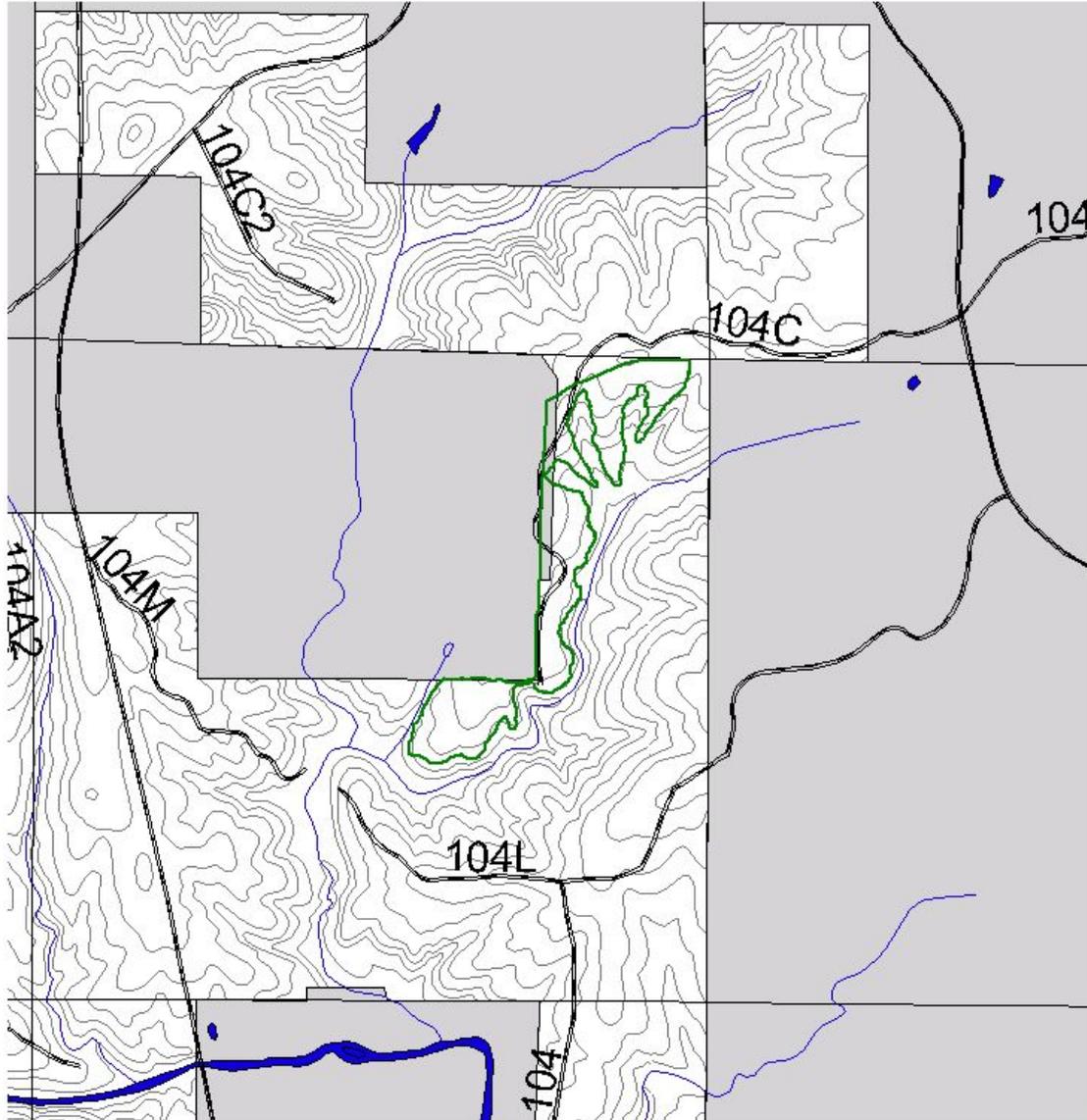
March 16, 2007

Date

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Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project Area Compartment 163 Biological Evaluation

- Legend**
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 - Sections.sip
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 - Wales.sip
 - Roads.sip
 - Private land.sip
 - Contours.sip



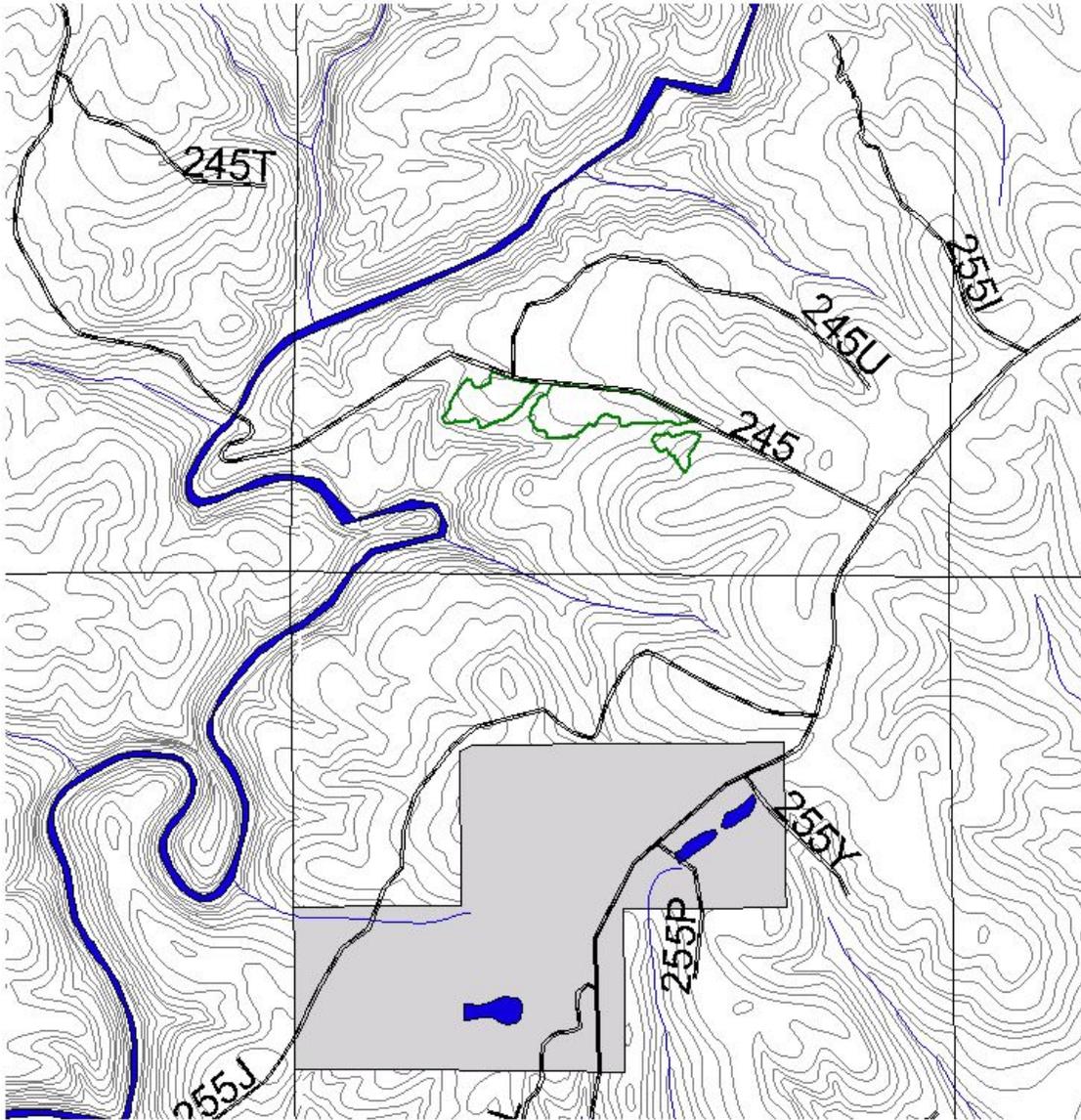
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Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project Area Compartment 19, Stand 3 Biological Evaluation

Legend

-  Roads.sip
-  Sections.sip
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-  Streams.sip
-  Waters.sip
-  Roads.sip
-  Private Land.sip
-  Contours.sip



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