

Decision Memo
Site Prep, Planting and Mechanical Release Project,
American Chestnut Research Site
FY 2007

USDA Forest Service
Bankhead National Forest
Bankhead Ranger District
Lawrence and Winston Counties, Alabama

Decision and Rationale for the Decision

I have decided to proceed with the proposal to perform site preparation followed by artificial regeneration by planting American Chestnut seedlings located in six, less than one-acre plots in Sections 3 & 11, T9S, R7W; Section 12, T9S, R9W; and Sections 25 and 36, T8S, R7W. These areas, totaling less than six acres, will be managed as research sites. The methods by which the site preparation will be accomplished include roller drum chopping and prescribed burning. Furthermore, manual release with hand tools and other mechanical means such as chainsaws will be performed, as needed, throughout the duration of the research study. These actions will take place during the fiscal year 2007 on a total of less than six regeneration acres.

The objectives of this project are to reduce competition and, therefore, provide for the establishment of native species for the purpose of research. 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. This particular prescription emphasizes restoration of “a mix of hardwood...forest communities based on historic conditions” ([RLRMP](#)).

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)

–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 Archaeological sites, or 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](#)) 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 September 9, 2006. Two responses were received. The first respondent expressed support of the project proposal. The second response was outside of the scope of the proposed project.

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 2002 version of 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 Gaines

GLEN D. GAINES
District Ranger

Oct. 19, 2006

Date