

DECISION MEMO

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM FY 2007 BANKHEAD RANGER DISTRICT NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALABAMA LAWRENCE AND WINSTON COUNTIES

I have decided to proceed with the proposed 2007 prescribed burning program. Approximately 14,518 acres will be prescribed burned in eighteen areas. Ten of the areas will be burned in either growing or dormant season and the remaining eight areas will be burned during the dormant season. Acreage by burn area is as follows:

Desired				
Burn	Burn Name	Desired Future Condition of Uplands	Dormant Acres	Growing or dormant Acres
1	Brown Creek	Oak Forests	854	
2	Brushy West	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		973
3	Clifty Fork	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	748	
4	Dry Creek	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		30
5	Fall City	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		464
6	Hall	Oak Woodlands	872	
7	Jim Brown	Oak Forests	1238	
8	Mile Creek	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		395
9	Pinetorch	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		440
10	Riddle	Shortleaf and Oak Woodlands	624	
11	Shelton	Oak Woodlands	1285	
12	Wolf Pen	Oak Forests	880	
13	Rockhouse	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		1263
14	Wilburn Ford	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		1070
	Subtotal		6501	4635
15	Old Oak Grove	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		442
16	Round Mtn	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		296
17	Walston Ridge	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands		1946
18	Well Woman	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	698	
	Subtotal		6501	2684
	TOTAL	Dormant & Growing = 14,518 acres	7199	7319

Purpose and Need

The role of prescribed fire in reducing forest fuels and as a wildlife management tool in southern forests is well documented. Now, there is increasing evidence of the important role fire plays in sustaining a variety of native upland forest communities, including the associated plant and animal diversity.

In the Bankhead National Forest, some areas have been prescribed burned frequently, but some have been without the influence of prescribed fire in seventy-five or more years. In many areas, the absence or infrequent use of fire has favored soft barked tree species (i.e. yellow poplar and red maple), rather than oak and hickory species. In areas which once supported shortleaf or longleaf pine woodlands, the lack of frequent fire has decreased the diversity of understory plant communities and associated wildlife species. The lack of prescribed

fire has increased forest fuel loads in some areas.

This proposal will use prescribed fire to accomplish two goals: (1) restoration of native upland forests and woodlands and the associated plant and animal diversity, and (2) reduce forest fuels, reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfire and improve the fire condition class of these forest areas.

In areas where prescribed fire has been absent or infrequent, dormant season burns will be the best tool to begin accomplishing these goals. In selected areas where prescribed fire has been used in recent years, vegetation and fuels may be in a condition that allows growing season burns to accelerate the accomplishment of the restoration goal.

The proposed action will be implemented between 2007 and 2009, depending upon weather, forest conditions and other management actions.

Affected Area

The Bankhead Ranger District is located in the Southern Cumberland Plateau. Soils range from fine sandy loam to clays. The topography within the forest is highly dissected by ridges and canyons.

There are a variety of forest community types within the burn areas. Existing forest communities targeted for the prescribed burning include: dry and xeric oak forests and woodlands (upland oak-hickory forests); xeric pine-oak forest and woodlands (upland pine-oak-hickory forests); upland longleaf forest and woodlands; dry-mesic oak forest; dry and dry-mesic oak-pine forest. Additional forest communities in the burn areas that will not be burned or burned at low intensity, with fire going out include: mixed mesophytic forest (cove hardwood-hemlock forests) and river floodplain forest (bottomland forest).

Mitigation measures, standards and guidelines of the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan will be followed.

Category

The proposed action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA) under FSH 1909.15, section 31.2, 6 (c) & (d) as established by the Chief:

"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). Examples include but are not limited to:

- (c). Prescribed burning to control understory hardwoods in stands of southern pine.
- (d). Prescribed burning to reduce natural fuel build-up and improve plant vigor."

No extraordinary circumstances as defined in FSH 1909.15, Section 30.3(2) exist that might cause the action to have significant effects:

- *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 and sensitive species, the biological evaluation was completed and the determination was “No effect” on plants and animals that are federally listed for the Bankhead NF and “No impact” to the species which are listed as Sensitive Species as per the Regional Forester’s list.
- *Flood plains, wetlands or municipal watersheds.* The project area is not in a flood plain, wetland or municipal watershed.

- *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 and research natural areas.* No part of the project area is designated as inventoried roadless area or research natural areas
- *American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites or historic properties or areas.* A cultural resources survey was conducted on the sites, and no properties that are eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places were found. Therefore, the proposed site preparation project will have no impact on significant cultural resources. The Bankhead Historical and Cultural Committee, a local special interest group, was consulted on activities occurring in the proposed special study areas.

Findings Required by Other Laws

National Forest Management Act - My decision is based on an analysis of the situation. This action is consistent with Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests of Alabama, Forest-Wide Goals and Objectives pp. 2-1 through 2-10; Goal 1, Objectives 1.3, 1.5; Goals 17, 18, Objective 18.1; Goal 19, Objective 19.1, Goals 20 and 21; Standards and Guides, FW-72, FW-73; FW-105; FW-106; FW-113 through FW 126 and with the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration project EIS.

Public Involvement

A scoping letter for this action was mailed on May 3, 2005 to persons or organizations on the Bankhead mailing list. Two responses were received and both supported the proposal as described. On May 7, 2005 the proposed action was published in the Northwest Alabamian to notify the general public and ask for comments on the proposal. No responses were received. On June 17, 2006, a legal notice was published in the Northwest Alabamian to request comments for thirty days on this proposal. No comments were received.

Any relevant issues have been considered and addressed in making this decision. Further details of the environmental analysis and mitigating measures applied to these burns are in the project file, located at the Bankhead Ranger District Office in Double Springs, Alabama.

Implementation

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately upon publication of the Notice of Decision in the paper of record, *The 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 D. Gaines
 GLEN D. GAINES
 District Ranger
 Bankhead National Forest

_____ August 25, 2006 _____
 Date