

## DECISION MEMO

### Hurricane Rita Storm Salvage Project FY 2006

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

#### Decision

I have decided to remove trees damaged and blown down by a tornado spawned by Hurricane Rita and restore longleaf pine on approximately 88 acres, located in Sections 35, Township 10 South, Range 8 West and Sections 2 and 11, Township 11 South, Range 8 West. This area is located south of Piney Grove Church south to Forest Service Road 110. These sites are located in Area 3 of the Forest Health and Restoration Project, National Forests in Alabama, Bankhead National Forest. This project will facilitate the restoration to the desired future conditions of longleaf pine woodlands as determined by the Forest Health and Restoration Project ([FHRP](#)) and as being proposed in the Rockhouse and Hoghouse Watershed Restoration Project.

On September 25, 2006, a tornado associated with Hurricane Rita blew down and damaged trees in this area. An estimated 88 acres of trees along a narrow stretch have areas of concentrated damage. This situation in these areas has created the following concerns:

- Large amount of downed trees complicates the restoration operations in these areas to longleaf pine woodlands.
- The large number of downed trees increases concerns about residual smoke during prescribed burning operations from smoldering heavy fuels.

The purpose of this project is to restore the area impacted by Hurricane Rita to longleaf pine woodlands by conducting the following:

- Utilize a commercial timber sale to salvage a significant portion of the damaged and downed trees in calendar year 2006
- After completing the salvage, prepare the area for planting to longleaf pine by roller drum chopping and prescribe burning in the summer or fall in 2007
- Plant the area with containerized longleaf pine seedlings in winter of 2008
- Conduct a prescribe burn in 2010 to release the longleaf seedlings from the grass stage

## Tornado Damage from Hurricane Rita



Removal of the merchantable parts of the damaged trees will facilitate the restoration of the project areas to the desired future conditions by reducing the amount of large woody debris that covers the areas. Trees that are damaged to the extent that survival is questionable will be removed also. This will simplify future site preparation activities (roller drum chopping and prescribed burning) and tree planting.

The majority of the area impacted is on dry, upland ridges. Erosion potential is slight due to the relatively flat topography on the ridges. There is a small section adjacent to ephemeral stream on the southern portion of the area will require tree removal by winching only (no equipment). The soils within the ephemeral stream channel and immediately adjacent to the stream channel are considered floodplain soils. Due to the direction of fall of most of the trees and the limitations on equipment use in the stream zone, it is expected that there will be some damage to residual trees from the cabling operation. By working closely with the operator this damage can be kept to a minimum. ([S&W report](#)).

### **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 (13) - Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres.*

- Actions will remove only those trees that were blown down, snapped off, and/or were otherwise damaged by Hurricane Rita.
- No new road construction is necessary to carry out this action.
- Actions will reduce hazardous fuels in the project area and improve ability to conduct longleaf pine restoration activities on these acres.

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. Properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places will be avoided and protected.

Monitoring of the area will be carried out regularly during active logging to insure that no additional damage is caused by the removal of the trees.

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

### **Public Involvement and Analysis**

Scoping with the public was accomplished on this proposal with a notice published in the Northwest Alabamian and in the Moulton Advertiser on February 9, 2006. A letter was mailed to the district mailing list on February 11, 2006, to notify the general public and ask for comments on the proposal.

A legal notice of formal notice and comment period being established for this project was published in the Northwest Alabamian on April 1, 2006. No comments were received.

A field trip was held on the Bankhead Ranger District on April 6, 2006. The field trip included a stop at the proposed salvage sale.

### **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 2-9 and 2-10), Goals 4 and 5, and associated Standards (p 2-19 to 2-21); and Goals 8 and 9 and associated Standards (p 2-24 to 2-27).

### **Implementation**

Pursuant to the 2002 version of 36 CFR 215.11 (a), this decision is not subject to appeal. Implementation of this decision may begin immediately. 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

May 3, 2006  
Date