

**DECISION MEMO**  
**WALSTON RIDGE OAK/PINE WOODLAND DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**  
**FY 2006-2010**  
**BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST**  
**NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALABAMA**  
**WINSTON COUNTY, ALABAMA**

**Decision and Rationale**

I have decided to proceed with the proposal to create a demonstration oak/pine woodland, approximately 39 acres in size, located in S6, T9S, R7W in the Walston Ridge area of the Bankhead National Forest. This project area is a featured area on the North Alabama birding trail and meets the direction of the desired future conditions for oak/pine woodland for the Bankhead National Forest as outlined in the Forest Health and Restoration Project EIS ([FHRP](#)) and the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests of Alabama ([RLRMP](#)).

The purpose of this project is to accelerate the establishment of an oak/pine woodland which will promote habitat for migratory songbirds and eastern wild turkey and to provide for the establishment of oak and hickory advanced regeneration.

The treatment area lies within a 98 year old stand which is a mixture of pine and hardwoods, and has a recent history of relatively frequent dormant season prescribed burns. Except for the southern pine beetle spots, there is almost complete canopy closure, with a basal area of approximately 120 ft<sup>2</sup>. The treatments will include reducing the basal area to a target of 50 – 60 ft<sup>2</sup> by removing merchantable intermediate and suppressed trees as well as part of the dominant and codominant trees in the overstory. Tree species prioritized for retention in the stand include black walnut, shortleaf pine, white oaks, red oaks, hickories, loblolly pine, black cherry, persimmon and yellow poplar. Additional treatments include prescribed burning, both dormant season and growing season, midstory removal and manual release of existing oak and hickory regeneration in openings. Reducing the basal area and the midstory treatment will be accomplished using a commercial timber sale. Understory treatment will be accomplished using prescribed burns and mechanical and/or manual treatments.

**Category**

This action is consistent with FSH 1909.15, Section 31.2, Category 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, FSH 7709.56), and category 12, “Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.”

- the action includes thinning, prescribe burning, midstory reduction, and manual release of seedlings
- the action will provide habitat for migratory songbirds, and eastern wild turkey
- existing roads will be used
- the action does not use herbicides

I find that the project is appropriate for the categorical exclusion within these categories because no extraordinary circumstances as defined in FSH 1909.15, Section 30.3(2) exist.

- *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 species, the biological evaluation ([BE](#)) was completed and the determination was “Not likely to adversely affect” on T&E species, and concurrence was received by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The determination on the Regional Forester’s sensitive species was “May impact individuals, but not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability” of these species.
- *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 of the project area, and no properties that are eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places were found. Therefore, the proposed thinning, prescribed burning, midstory reduction and manual or mechanical release treatments will have no impact on significant cultural resources.

## **Public Involvement and Analysis**

A scoping notice of the proposed action was published in the Northwest Alabamian on February 12, 2005 and in the Moulton Advertiser on February 9, 2005 to notify the general public and ask for comments on the proposal. Eight comments were received concerning this proposal during the scoping comment period and the respondents were supportive of the action as proposed, provided the needed surveys and analysis work was accomplished prior to the beginning of the project work.

A legal notice of formal notice and comment period being established for this project was published in the Northwest Alabamian on December 14, 2005. In addition a letter was sent to the District mailing list notifying interested parties in the establishment of formal notice and comment period for this project. Three comments were received during the formal notice and comment period. Two were reiterations of their supportive comments submitted during scoping. One comment requested reconsideration of the project based on potential damage to residual trees during treatment, however implementation of similar projects have indicated that residual damage is not significant and public response to those projects has been strongly positive.

## Findings Required by Other Laws

**National Forest Management Act** - My decision is based on an analysis of the situation and this area will be treated to promote the restoration of an upland oak/pine woodland consistent with the 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 and 1.5; Standards FW-9, FW-11, FW-37 through FW-43, FW-45 through FW-48, FW-50, FW-58 through FW-69, FW-74, FW-76, FW-96, FW-115, FW-116 and FW-117; Goals 27, 28 and 29, Objective 27.1; Standards FW-145 through FW-147; and Goal 30, Standards FW-151 through FW-153; Management Prescription 7.E.2, pp 3-31 through 3-34 ([RLRMP](#)) and the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Project ([FHRP](#)).

## Implementation

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (e), this decision is not subject to appeal. Implementation of this decision may begin immediately upon publication of the Notice of Decision. For further information, contact Glen Gaines, Bankhead National Forest, PO Box 278, Double Springs, AL or at (205) 489-5111.

/s/ Glen D. Gaines

1/23/2006

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GLEN D. GAINES  
District Ranger  
Bankhead National Forest

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Date