

DECISION MEMO

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM FY 2006 BANKHEAD RANGER DISTRICT NATIONAL FORESTS IN ALABAMA LAWRENCE AND WINSTON COUNTIES

I have decided to proceed with the proposed 2006 prescribed burning program. Approximately 12,952 acres will be prescribed burned in fifteen areas. Six of the areas will be burned in either growing or dormant season and the remaining will be burned during the dormant season. Acreage by burn area is as follows:

<u>Burn #</u>	<u>Burn Name</u>	Desired <u>Condition Emphasis</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
1	Antioch	Oak Forests	766
2	Beech Creek	Oak Woodlands	786
3	Brushy Lake	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	1065
4	Collier Creek	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	1188
5	*Gene Hill	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	1254
6	*Hog House	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	482
7	*Inman Creek	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	792
8	Inman Field	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	838
9	*Jail House	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	1143
10	Key Mill	Oak Woodlands	1231
11	Mt. Olive	Oak Forests	665
12	*Otter Branch	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	290
13	Payne Creek	Shortleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	907
14	*Slick Ford	Longleaf/Bluestem and Oak Woodlands	648
15	Telephone	Oak Woodlands	897
	Total		12,952

* denotes growing
or dormant

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 fire adapted 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 2006 and 2008, depending upon weather and forest conditions.

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 and 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.

Public Involvement

On July 17, 2004 the proposed action was published in the Northwest Alabamian to notify the general public and ask for comments on the proposal. A scoping letter for this action was mailed on July 15, 2004 to persons or organizations on the Bankhead mailing list. Two responses were received and both supported the proposal as described.

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.

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

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f), this decision is not subject to appeal. Implementation of this decision may occur immediately. For additional information concerning this decision, contact Glen Gaines, Bankhead Ranger District, at (205) 489-5111.

/s/ Glen D. Gaines

July 14, 2005

GLEN D. GAINES

Date

District Ranger

Bankhead National Forest