

## **Decision Memo**

# **Fuels Reduction and Wildlife Habitat Improvement**

on Shoebarn and Oh'bryans Sites

**USDA Forest Service  
Bankhead Ranger District, National Forests in Alabama  
Winston County, Alabama**

### **Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

#### **Background**

The purpose and need for the project is to decrease the risk of catastrophic wildfires by reducing fuels, improve wildlife habitat, improve conditions for native upland plants, and restore and maintain native forest communities, specifically fire dependent woodlands. The project sites have not been managed in the past to achieve open, fire dependent woodlands. The resulting conditions are a heavy buildup of shrubs, saplings, and trees in the understory and midstory of these stands.

Originally, five sites (longleaf and loblolly pine stands) were proposed for treatment by a variety of methods. All five sites were included in public scoping efforts. This decision is on two of the original five sites. These two sites will be treated by hand cutting (chainsaw) method. Therefore, they are being considered separately from the other three sites. The project will reduce midstory and understory trees and shrubs from two sites totaling 99 acres. The two sites proposed for treatment are longleaf pine stands. The midstory and understory will be reduced by hand cutting (chainsaw) method. The sites are proposed for treatment in the winter of 2005. The result will be open pine stands with reduced fuel loading in the understory. The result will allow for restoration and maintenance of fire dependent woodland systems.

The sites proposed for treatment are located within Winston County in the Bankhead National Forest (BNF). The Shoebarn and Oh'Bryans sites are located in the Black Pond community. The sites are longleaf pine stands. They are located within established prescribed burn units. All sites are in Management Prescription 9C3 – Southern Cumberland Plateau Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance – as identified in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. All sites are in Area 3 as identified in the Bankhead's Forest Health and Restoration Project's Final Environmental Impact Statement. Maps of the sites are on file at the District Office.

#### **Decision**

Based upon my review, I have decided to implement this project, which will reduce midstory and understory trees and shrubs from the two sites to reduce fuel loading and restore fire dependent woodlands.

## Public Involvement

Potentially interested persons were notified by mail, and the proposal was advertised in *The Northwest Alabamian* and the *The Moulton Advertiser* in November of 2004 and January of 2005. Two written comments were received. One was in support of the proposal. The second was a request for additional information. Additionally, on January 18, 2004 twelve interested persons accompanied Forest Service personnel on a field trip to one of the sites (Shoebarn site) to discuss the proposal.

## Findings

The action will have no significant adverse effect on sites listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because the Shoebarn and Oh'bryans sites will not be treated by ground disturbing methods. Handtools only will be used at these sites.

A biological evaluation of the areas was conducted in November and December of 2004 and January of 2005. Previous surveys and biological evaluations of the project areas have been conducted in 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 for related projects including prescribed burning and the Forest Health and Restoration project. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, or any species listed as sensitive by the Regional Forester.

The action is consistent with FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, 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). No extraordinary circumstances exist that might cause the action to have significant effects. Therefore, this action is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The action is consistent with the National Forests in Alabama's Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. This decision to decrease the risk of catastrophic wildfires by reducing fuels, improve wildlife habitat, improve conditions for native upland plants, and restore and maintain native forest communities, specifically fire dependent woodlands by reducing midstory and understory trees and shrubs from is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages 2-2 to 2-10 and management prescription 9.C.3. Southern Cumberland Plateau Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance on pages 3-37 to 3-38.

## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f) is not subject to appeal and may be implemented immediately.

## Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Tom Counts, District Wildlife Biologist, Bankhead Ranger District, PO Bo 278, Double Springs, AL 35553, or 205/489-5111.

/s/ Glen Gaines

February 1, 2005

GLEN GAINES  
District Ranger  
Bankhead Ranger District

Date

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