

## DECISION MEMO

### Midstory Removal Project Quail Emphasis Area Rockhouse, Hoghouse, and Inman Watersheds FY 2007 - 2009

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

#### Decision

I have decided to conduct mechanical removal of understory and midstory vegetation on approximately 113 acres. These treatment areas are located in Sections 26, 35, and 36, Township 9 South, Range 7 West and Section 10, Township 11 South, Range 8 West on the Bankhead National Forest. These sites are located in Area 2 and Area 3 of the Forest Health and Restoration Project, National Forests in Alabama, Bankhead National Forest ([FHRP](#)). The project areas are within Management Prescription 9.C.3, Southern Cumberland Plateau Native Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance, as outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan ([RLRMP](#)). The emphasis in 9.C.3 is to manage the area to maintain or move towards restoration of a mix of hardwood, hardwood-pine and pine (including shortleaf and longleaf) forest communities based on historic conditions. Additionally, the [RLRMP](#) provides direction in Goal 16 to provide habitats to support desirable levels of selected species (e.g., species with special habitat needs such as large, contiguous forested landscapes; species commonly trapped/hunted; or species of special interest).

The purpose of this project is to improve wildlife and native plant habitat and facilitate restoration of fire adapted woodland desired conditions as identified by the ([FHRP](#)). This project is the first in a series of planned treatments in Bankhead National Forest's Quail Emphasis Area in the Black Pond and Inmanfield communities. Thick midstory vegetation present in the project areas is prohibiting the establishment of native warm season grasses and forbs in the understory of these stands. Restoration and maintenance of upland pine woodlands is essential for Northern Bobwhite quail habitat improvement.

#### Midstory Treatment

This treatment will use mechanical equipment to mow and/or mulch understory and midstory brush and trees up to seven inches in diameter from selected stands. Longleaf pine and shortleaf pine up to five inches in diameter will be removed. Some dogwood, selected xeric oak species and other mast trees will be identified for retention. This treatment will improve wildlife and native plant habitat, and facilitate restoration of fire adapted woodlands desired conditions as identified by the ([FHRP](#)).



Example of Current Condition



Example of Desired Condition

### **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 (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).*

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.* – A biological evaluation for threatened, endangered or sensitive plants and animals (TES) has been completed for this project. The determination for the midstory treatment ([BE](#)) 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 will be conducted on the project areas before ground disturbing activities are initiated. Properties that are eligible or potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, if present, will be

protected from disturbance. Therefore, the proposed treatments will have no impact on significant cultural resources.

### **Public Involvement and Analysis**

Scoping with the public was accomplished on this proposal with a notice published in the Northwest Alabamian April 14, 2007. A letter was mailed to the district mailing list on April 10, 2007, to notify the general public and ask for comments on the proposal. Two comments were received and the respondents were supportive of the action as proposed.

A legal advertisement establishing formal notice and comment period for this project was published in the Northwest Alabamian on July 18, 2007. Additionally, a letter notifying interested parties of the formal notice and comment period was mailed to the District mailing list on July 16, 2007. Two supportive comments were received.

### **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.

### **Implementation**

Implementation of this decision may begin immediately upon publication of the Notice of Decision in the paper of record (*Northwest Alabamian*).

### **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

Pursuant to 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 23, 2007

Date

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