

**Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative  
Liaison Panel  
Mission and Ground Rules  
February 4, 2003**

**I. Mission of the Liaison Panel**

The Bankhead Liaison Panel is made of individuals that represent a diverse cross section of public interests on the Bankhead National Forest. The goal of the panel is to:

- 1) Learn about projects, plans, health and status of the Bankhead National Forest,
- 2) Communicate clearly with other Liaison Panel members about each others preferences and interests,
- 3) Consider, discuss, and provide possible solutions to a variety of issues on the Bankhead.

The Liaison Panel aspires to develop solutions that are acceptable to all panel members or at least to a large majority of the members. The Panel meetings are open to the public and the meetings provide a forum for the public to come together to learn, discuss and help resolve difficult land management issues.

**II. Short Term Objective (2003)**

The short-term objective of the Liaison Panel is to provide recommendations to the Forest Service on the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.

- 1) Learn about Bankhead Forest Health and share information about the alternatives proposed to meet the desired future conditions.
- 2) Discuss concerns and viewpoints about the proposed alternatives and the ir possible impacts,
- 3) Communicate each other's preferences and interests about the proposed Forest Health Initiative alternatives.
- 4) Identify criteria for evaluating the alternative plans,
- 5) Narrow disagreements regarding Forest Health and Restoration Initiative alternatives,
- 6) Agree on one proposed alternative as a recommendation to the U.S. Forest Service, the agreement will be documented in a meeting summary.

### **III. Liaison Panel Membership**

Liaison Panel members were recruited and are appointed by the United States Forest Service.

- 1) The Liaison Panel is made up of individuals from key groups of interested parties, (stakeholder groups) who agree to represent their own and their organization's viewpoints and interests.
- 2) The Liaison Panel will approve its membership at its first meeting by consensus.
- 3) The Liaison Panel strongly encourages members to attend all meetings to ensure consistency, informed discussion, and effective decision-making.
- 4) The Liaison Panel can add new members by consensus at any time, if it identifies key interests and concerns that are not represented.
- 5) Members will serve for a period of at least one year from the start of the Liaison Panel.
- 6) Stakeholder groups or organizations may appoint an alternate if necessary to ensure adequate participation. The stakeholder group or organization will name the alternate. This alternate will receive all member correspondence. The regular member must keep the alternate up to date on the issues, decisions, and learnings.
- 7) At the end of the year, the Liaison Panel will develop a new set of short-term objectives to keep their work focused and relevant.
- 8) If the objectives change substantially, the Liaison Panel may review any needs for new members to represent those new issues or concerns.

### **IV. Public Outreach and Participation**

- 1) Interested citizens and residents are encouraged to participate by attending and observing Liaison Panel meetings, receiving Liaison Panel mailings, being a member of a Work Group, and assisting on specific projects, where appropriate.
- 2) The public may ask questions; provide information or recommendations when the facilitator calls upon them or when a Liaison Panel member asks for their input.

## **V. Responsibilities of Liaison Panel Membership**

Members agree to:

- 1) Attend all regularly scheduled meetings. If a member is not able to attend a meeting, s/he may communicate views through another member or the facilitators.
- 2) Participate in educational briefings on forest health, the NEPA process, forest ecology, forest management, forest economics, history, and culture of the area, and forest health and restoration activities, and other subjects as agreed upon by the group.
- 3) Come to each meeting prepared to discuss the issues on the agenda. Preparation includes reviewing meeting summaries and materials mailed out prior to each meeting.
- 4) Help create the Liaison Panel's meeting agendas and work plans.
- 5) Represent their individual views as well as the views of her/his constituents (i.e. organizations, businesses, or neighborhoods) to the best of their ability.
- 6) Provide information to the public and to constituents to ensure that the larger public learns about the Liaison Panel's efforts.
- 7) Strive throughout the process to engage in respectful, productive discussions with other members of the group, bridge gaps in understanding, seek creative resolution of differences, and commit to the goal of achieving consensus on topics under discussion.
- 8) Appoint a mechanism for coordination and planning (Steering Committee) to develop agendas, work plans, and communicate with members between meetings.
- 9) Seek to be aware of, represent and speak for his/her own interest, but also the collective interests of the Liaison Panel.

## **VI. Communication among Members and Meeting Attendees**

To promote an open and collaborative discussion, members and the public who attend meetings will agree to the following rules:

- 1) Only one person will speak at a time and no one will interrupt when another person is speaking.
- 2) Each person will express his or her own views rather than speaking for others at the table.
- 3) No one will make personal attacks or issue statements blaming others for specific actions or outcomes. If a personal attack is made, the facilitator may ask the members to refrain from personal attacks. If personal attacks continue, the facilitator may ask the group to take a break to "cool off."

- 4) Members will avoid grandstanding (extended comments and questions) in order to allow everyone a fair chance to speak and to contribute.
- 5) Each person will make every effort to stay on track with the agenda and to move the deliberations forward.
- 6) Each meeting will provide opportunities for the public's questions and comments.

Members are expected to communicate concerns, interests, and ideas openly and to make the reasons for their disagreements clear. In the event that a member is unable to speak about a concern directly to another member, he or she can contact the facilitators by phone (or in person). The facilitators may serve as a channel for such concerns as well as work with parties between meetings, as necessary, to resolve conflicts. Upon request, all information or views shared during conversations with the facilitators will be kept confidential.

## **VII. Making Liaison Panel Decisions**

- 1) To make decisions, the Liaison Panel will operate by consensus. Consensus means there is no dissent by any member. Granting “consent” means that each member can live with the decision and support its implementation.
- 2) With the right to offer consent or express dissent as a Liaison Panel member, comes the responsibility of making clear the reasons for dissent and making every effort to offer an alternative proposal satisfactory to other members.
- 3) Members should remain at the table during deliberations to hear the full discussions in order to make informed judgments when decision-making occurs. Members may also choose not to consent on a decision, but to abstain without offering dissent.
- 4) Absence will be equivalent to abstaining.
- 5) To ensure full participation, fairness, and legitimacy of decisions, the Liaison Panel will:
  - a) Choose significant decisions as including, but not limited to, finalizing/changing operating principles, developing criteria for evaluating options, and selecting an alternative.
  - b) All significant decisions that need to be made will be, whenever possible, included in meeting agendas shared before meetings.
  - c) Decision-making over significant decisions will take place over at least two meetings, whenever possible, to ensure adequate deliberation.
  - d) All meeting summaries will include a listing of major decisions made and list the members in attendance that made the decision.

- 6) If all efforts have been made to arrive at full consensus, but it appears that the Liaison Panel will not be able to achieve it, the group may choose to proceed with less than consensus in order to achieve progress. In the event of this lack of consensus, the Liaison Panel will;
  - a) Allow time for the dissenting parties to express their concerns and reasons for dissent,
  - b) Note the range of views presented on the decision at hand and record those views in the meeting summaries, and,
  - c) Make clear in any verbal or written communications that the decision was made in order to proceed, but that consensus was not achieved.

### **VIII. Role of Facilitators**

The facilitators will:

- 1) Help draw up agendas;
- 2) Facilitate meetings;
- 3) Help the group members comply with ground rules;
- 4) Identify and synthesize points of agreement and disagreement;
- 5) Help build consensus among members;
- 6) Serve as a confidential communication channel for members or observers as needed;
- 7) Support a fair, effective, and credible process, but remain completely nonpartisan about the outcome of the deliberations;
- 8) Prepare meeting summaries and track action items and future agendas; and,
- 9) Track group attendance. Each meeting summary will include a list of attendees. If a member of the group misses more than three meetings, the facilitators will contact that person to inquire why the person has been absent and if that person intends to continue participating in the Liaison Panel. The facilitators will then share this information to the group as a whole and the group will take action, as and if necessary.

The facilitators are bound to the Association of Conflict Resolution's Code of Ethics that states: "The neutral must maintain impartiality toward all parties. Impartiality means freedom from favoritism or bias either by word or by action, and a commitment to serve all parties as opposed to a single party."

## **IX. Meeting Summaries and Meeting Notification**

- 1) Meeting summaries of decisions, action items, next steps, and key issues, will be prepared for each meeting. The meeting summary will be distributed in draft form to group members for review and approval. To encourage open, frank, and informal dialogue, meetings will not be tape-recorded or videotaped. However, given that meetings will be open to the public, the media may tape record and/or videotape meetings, as they deem useful and necessary.
- 2) The facilitators will notify group members about group meetings by notifying members by email, regular mail, and by posting meeting dates in The Mouton Advertiser and The Decatur Daily.

## **X. Media**

- 1) All Liaison Panel meetings will be open to the public and the media.
- 2) Members are free to make statements to the press regarding their own opinions, but agree not to attribute statements to others involved in the process. In order to facilitate productive deliberations, members will make every effort to abide by the ground rules under the section "Communication" listed above while interacting with the media.
- 3) No member should speak for the group as a whole. If the media would like a view from the whole group, the Liaison Panel will appoint a spokesperson or another mechanism.

## **XI. Agenda Planning**

The Liaison Panel will form a small, diverse group of members (Steering Committee) to plan agendas and develop draft work plans between meetings. Agenda planning will involve the following activities.

- 1) The facilitators will keep track of proposed future agenda items that arise in Liaison Panel meetings.
- 2) Within two weeks of a Liaison Panel meeting, any Liaison Panel member may notify the facilitators of any more potential agenda items for the next meeting.
- 3) The facilitators will compile and forward potential agenda items to the Steering Committee for review.
- 4) The Steering Committee will meet via conference call to develop a draft agenda for the upcoming Liaison Panel meeting.
- 5) The facilitators will email/mail the draft agenda to the members at least one week prior to the meeting.

- 6) The draft agenda will be reviewed and agreed upon at the start of each Liaison Panel meeting.

## **XII. Coordination with the Technical Resources**

TO BE DETERMINED.

## **XIII. Coordination with Work Group**

Each Work Group will try to have members that represent the different interested stakeholder groups.

- 1) Work Group meetings will be open to active participation by Liaison Panel alternates and interested others, as long as they agree to abide by the Liaison Panel ground rules.
- 2) Each Work Group will appoint a coordinator who will chair meetings, ensure the Work Group performs its tasks, enforce the group rules, and coordinate with the facilitators. The work groups will generally not be facilitated, but facilitation help will be provided, if needed.
- 3) The facilitator will identify one member of the facilitation team who can support the work by arranging meeting space, noticing meetings, preparing action items and brief summaries, and help the Work Group achieve their goals in the overall context of the Liaison panel goals.
- 4) The liaison Panel will set the charge for each Work Group, deciding on the Work Group's overall purpose and objectives as well as providing clear Direction for the Work Groups work between Liaison Panel meetings.
- 5) Work groups will seek to review scientific and technical information, generate ideas, consider choices, suggest priorities, and make recommendations. However, the full Liaison Panel keeps all significant decision-making authority.
- 6) Work groups will develop brief action items/recommendations to give to all Liaison Panel members before meetings where the Work Groups work will be discussed and acted on. Liaison Panel members should come prepared by reviewing Work Group work so the full Liaison Panel meetings can be action and decision oriented rather than report and update oriented.