

Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel Meeting Summary May 6, 2003

Bank Building - Double Springs, AL

APPROVED (For general distribution) May 29, 2003

Attendance

Liaison Panel Members:

Charles Borden, *Resident, Recreationist, and Wild Alabama Board member*

Maragret Dunn, *Cherokee of Tribe of NE Alabama*

Ron Eakes, *Fisheries; Area Manager, Black Warrior WMA*

Randy Feltman, *Logger and Local Resident*

Mike Henshaw, *Winston Co. Forest Planning Committee*

Quinton Humphries, *Winston Co. Commission*

*Rob Hurt, *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*

*Vince Meleski, *Wild Alabama*

Mary Lee Ratliff, *Recreation*

Bill Snoddy, *Treasure Forest Landowner*

Johnny Warren, *Resident*

*Faron Weeks, *Warrior Mtn. Cultural and Historical Society*

USFS Personnel:

John Creed, *Bankhead District*

Glen Gaines, *District Ranger*

Jean Allan, *Bankhead District*

Interested People/ Other Attendees:

Peggy Armstrong

Bobby Ayers

Janet Campbell

Joe Copeland

Rory Fraser

Anthony Hood

JD Snoddy

Athel Wilhite

Donnie and Adam Williams

Facilitation Staff:

Juliana Birkhoff, *RESOLVE*

Bill Sanford, *Natural Resources Leadership Institute*

* denotes Alternate Panel Member

May 6, 2003 Meeting Agenda

5:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

1. Welcome, Review Meeting Agenda and Objectives, Review Decision-Making Ground Rules
2. Review Culture and Historic Impacts Information
3. Review and Agree on Liaison Panel Decision-Making Criteria
4. Seeking Agreement
5. Summarize Discussion Areas and Identify Next Steps

Handouts Provided

1. Meeting Agenda: May 6
2. Decision-Making Criteria
3. Draft Meeting Summary: Apr. 17
4. Meleski Matrix
5. Handouts from past meetings
6. Alabama Historical Commission Policy for Archeological Survey and Testing in Alabama
7. Alabama Archeology (Booklet produced by Alabama Historical Commission)

Decisions/Agreements Made:

- 1. Approved the April 17 meeting summary.
- 2. Approved list of decision-making criteria.
- 3. The next meeting will be begin at 6:00 pm at the Moulton Rec Center, May 29.

Action Items:

- 1. Forest Service staff will check with the Moulton Rec Center to see whether the next Panel meeting can go past 9:30 p.m. (if necessary).
- 2. Attach decision-making tool with draft of meeting summary.
- 3. John and Allison will work on proposing additional ideas to enhance wildlife in Area 1, in preparation for the May 29th meeting.
- 4. Liaison Panel members who were unable to attend the meeting are encouraged to contact other members about the decision-making tool process, decisions that were made, and to begin working through the tool themselves in preparation for the May 29 meeting.

I. WELCOME, AGENDA, AND MEETING GROUND RULES

A. Welcome

Juliana Birkhoff welcomed those present and invited everyone to introduce themselves.

B. Agenda

Juliana reviewed the agenda and listed four objectives for the meeting:

- 1. Review Information on Cultural and Historic Impacts of the Health and Restoration Initiative
- 2. Review and Agree on Liaison Panel Decision-making Criteria
- 3. Discuss Liaison Panel Members Suggestions on How to Improve the Alternatives
- 4. Seek Agreement on an Alternative and Improvements

The Panel approved the agenda.

Format Key: Questions (Q), Response (R), Comment (C), Discussion (D) & Action (A): .

C. Ground Rules and Consensus Decision Making

Juliana reviewed the ground rules for the meeting, as well as the five-point scale of consensus that the facilitators introduced in January.

D. Approval of April 17 Meeting Summary

The Panel approved the April 17 meeting summary with minor editorial changes.

II. REVIEW CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL IMPACTS INFORMATION

Jean Allan, from the Bankhead Ranger District, gave a brief presentation and answered questions following up on Kent Schneider’s presentation to the Panel on April 17.

A. Overview of the Site Survey and Testing Process Used in Alabama

- 1. Background work: Check land acquisition records to see who the owners were and what buildings were there; check historical aerial photos for locations of roads and trails; check overview documents (books, reports, and compilations); and contact local people who might know about the site.
- 2. Visit the area and follow testing regimen. Regimen indicates where and how to look. Activities may include shovel tests, drawing maps, and taking pictures.
- 3. Analysis, reporting, and recommendations are made regarding

the site, and are submitted for Section 106 review. Based on the surveys and testing, activities such as making trails or thinning trees may be moved or curtailed. May be asked to do further testing.

B. Key Discussion Points

Some of the land for this EIS has already been surveyed. The Forest Service will ensure that any important sites (“special areas” are marked properly to ensure their protection. Their goal is to protect as many intact sites as is reasonably possible.

As sites are identified, they are *not* made public – nor is anything done to prevent Native Americans from visiting those sites. The public cannot access information about sites, even through the Freedom of Information Act. In order to visit a site, people (such as researchers or tribal historic preservation officers) need to go through an extensive proposal/application process. There are very stiff penalties for those caught damaging sites on federal land.

The Forest Service will break the land into 300-600 acre groups for the Forest Service archeologist to survey for this EIS. Three to six segments will be identified each year for five years. No ground disturbances will be allowed on those sites before the survey reports are reviewed and approved.

The Forest Service will not promote or advertise any traditional cultural sites, ceremonial sites, etc., though it is permissible for the Forest Service to discuss historic properties that are not used for private ceremonies, such as Pine Torch Church, for example.

The Forest Service cannot protect sites that it does not know about. If you find a site and want to be sure the USFS knows about it, you can call Jean. If you see signs of looting in the forest, please call Jean, Ron Eakes, or another official.

III. REVIEW DECISION-MAKING CRITERIA

The Panel reviewed the list of decision-making criteria that they developed in the April 17 meeting. After modifying the second and fifth bullet points, the Panel approved the following list as decision-making criteria for this EIS:

1. Future users will say the Liaison Panel did a good job.
2. Liaison Panel used the best science and information available at the time.
3. Qualified decision-making: way of thinking behind decisions is transparent, clear, and documented.
4. Meets interests of the panel members.
5. Adaptive – allows for incremental learning and future modifications through monitoring.
6. Collaborative problem solving – allows for partnerships and sharing of resources.
7. Base use of prescribed fire on fuel load and/or timeframe.

IV. SEEKING AGREEMENT

A. The Process of Seeking Agreement, and Discussion

Recognizing that they cannot discuss different aspects of multiple alternatives at the same time, the Panel agreed to focus their discussion on Alternative 5, considering one aspect of the alternative at a time.

The group reviewed the “Meleski Matrix,” which organizes key information about each of the alternatives on a single sheet of paper, to be sure that they all knew how to read it.

A few questions about the alternatives arose during the review of the Meleski Matrix:

Q How much more could we thin?

R The acres identified in Alternatives 3 and 5 are about the maximum that could be thinned using the current set of criteria (for example, thinning only trees in a certain age range and working on stands of 10 or more acres). This is the most that can reasonably be addressed at this time. Additional acres may be thinned at the end of this 5-year period, because conditions will have changed.

Q What will the impact of the EIS be on the local timber market?

R Insignificant. Only a couple thousand acres are in question.

Q How will we thin and manage for shortleaf?

D Although we do not know the precise conditions under which shortleaf grew in this area, we have clues. The USFS plans to plant them and then use management practices to help them to grow. Only about 772 acres will be managed this way over the next five years, so it is a rather gradual process. The Forest Service plans to see how things go and re-evaluate after five years.

B. Alternative Five

Using the attached decision-making tool, the Panel discussed elements of Alternative Five and indicated modifications they would like to see in order to make the Alternative meet their interests.

Q How will decisions be made about when and where to burn?

R Basically, each site will tell you what it needs. Depending upon a number of factors, the fuel load of a given site may require burning every 2 years, or maybe it can wait 5 years. The sites will be inspected regularly (perhaps annually) and see if it is within acceptable parameters or if it needs a prescribed fire.

Q Is this good for game wildlife?

R Yes.

Q When do you burn?

R The current plan is to burn in the dormant season, between December and the end of March.

Q Does this Alternative allow for the existence of food plots in Area 1?

R It does not say that food plots will be used, but it does not prohibit us from using them, either. That option could be added through a different decision, or it could be written into this alternative without it being considered a significant change.

R It would be a good idea for the Desired Future Conditions (DFCs) to say that conditions on the landscape will determine what strategies are used when.

1. Acres for Thinning

The Panel said no changes were needed in the total acres identified for thinning in any of the three areas.

2. Acres for SPB Treatment

The Panel said no changes were needed in the total acres identified for SPB treatment in any of the three areas.

D The USFS is not anticipating any major SPB problem for the next 3 years or so. If we can get through this thinning cycle, then stands won't be as susceptible to SPB – so the Forest Service does not anticipate more SPB problems any time soon.

Q What about the acres in Area 1 that are not addressed in this Alternative?

R They are not high-risk areas right now, and should be fine for the next 5 years. They will be addressed later.

Q Will Alternative 5 reduce the loblolly to 0% of the forest?

R The percentages in the pie charts are percentages of stands that are predominantly one type or another. There will still be some loblollies mixed

in, but the DFC in Alternative 5 proposes to have no loblolly stands.

D This is about the only opportunity to reestablish the shortleaf bluestem. Will still have hardwood/pine mixtures occur naturally.

3. Management Practices for Thinning and Treatment

Q Does this Alternative allow for the use of herbicides for single trees or non-natives?

R Herbicides are not viable for this EIS, and cannot be added since that option has not been scoped. A separate proposal about invasive species does include the use of herbicides.

Q Based on what we learned at the March 8 meeting, is a 3-5-10 year burning cycle too often?

R The experts who spoke on March 8 suggested that the burns might need to be conducted more frequently at first, and then less frequently over time. The original alternative said 3 years, but this allows more flexibility.

R The 3-5 year range is for oak woodlands; 10 years for some of the rest; no burning for other parts.

D The panel discussed the challenges of re-establishing shortleaf pine, and whether *pre-commercial thinning* was a viable option. John Creed and Glen Gaines (USFS) said they would focus on getting the shortleaf sites prepped using mechanical means and getting the shortleaf in the ground, then using hand tools and seeing what they need to do to keep the shortleaf where they can compete. This is a 5-year experiment on these 700 acres. Once the shortleaf make it through the first six years (and the trees are large enough to bear cones), they can start incorporating fire. A monitoring process is in place, calling for a survival check after one year

and a certification check after three years. The Forest Service can also bring in researchers to help track and monitor.

Q Are super-mulching machines an option?

R The Forest Service has tried using a machine like that in the Bankhead before, and it did not hold up well. It could be used experimentally, but roller drum chopping is effective and the USFS has limited resources to both implement the alternative and experiment with new techniques.

C A panel member suggested modifying the alternative to state that wherever possible, the USFS would explore new methods and technologies to minimize environmental impact.

Q Could we set up experiments to see whether contract or commercial harvests have less impact?

R With stringent USFS standards, commercial and contract harvests have about the same impact. Safeguards are already in place. Commercial loggers must put up a bond, allowing for penalties or damage assessments if they exceed impact standards.

C The alternative should stipulate that the USFS continue to use best management practices to minimize impacts, in whatever way the USFS can identify.

4. Desired Future Conditions (Forest Type %s)
The panel did not have time to discuss this topic.

5. Management Actions to Protect Special Habitats

Q Can additional steps be taken to improve or increase the amount of wildlife habitat, especially in Area 1?

R Area 1 has more thinning acres than the other areas, and that will be great for wildlife there over the next 5-10 years. This alternative meets the need for good

wildlife habitat for the next six years or so.
More work can be done at that point, too.

- A John and Alison will work on developing other ideas about this for the next meeting.

V. SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

- A. The Panel has not formally agreed upon Alternative 5. They are using Alternative 5 as a starting point and are trying to develop a package of modifications that would make Alternative 5 agreeable to the panel. Once the group has discussed the 7 elements of the package (using the decision-making tool), the panel will look at the package as a whole and see if they can reach consensus.
- B. The panel will keep working through the decision tool on May 29.
- C. In the meantime, Panel members are asked to keep thinking of things that would make Alternative 5 better, including recommendations from the Panel that might not actually be included in the formal wording of the EIS.
- D. The next meeting will be held at the Moulton Rec Center on May 29 at 6:00 p.m.
- E. The Forest Service will ask Rec Center staff if we can stay past the usual 9:30 p.m. deadline, if necessary.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:10 p.m.