

Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel (BNFLP)
**May 29th Meeting Summary and Agreements on the Forest Health
and Restoration Initiative**

Moulton Community Centre – Moulton, AL

APPROVED (For general distribution) June 16, 2003

Attendance

Liaison Panel Members:

Randall Lou Allen, Lawrence County Commission
Myra Ball, *Ala. Conservation and Multi-Use*
Margaret Dunn, *Cherokee Tribe of NE Alabama*
Ron Eakes, *Ala. Dept. of Wildlife & Freshwater
Fisheries; Area Manager, Black Warrior WMA*
Randy Feltman, *Logger and Local Resident*
Gene Gold, *Echota Cherokee of Alabama*
Mike Henshaw, *Alabama Cooperative Extension
Service*
Quinton Humphries, *Winston Co. Commission*
Rob Hurt, *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*
Vince Meleski, *Wild Alabama*
Bill Snoddy, *Treasure Forest Landowner*
Keith Tassin, *The Nature Conservancy*
Faron Weeks, *Warrior Mountain Cultural and
Historical Society*

USFS Personnel:

John Creed, *Bankhead District*
Allison Cochran, *Bankhead District*
Tom Counts, *Bankhead District*
Glen Gaines, *District Range*
Kathy Wallace, *Bankhead District*

Interested People/ Other Attendees:

Sheron Ball
April Blelew
Janet Campbell
Christine Crimmon
Rory Frasier
Evelyn Harrison
Anthony Hood

Facilitators:

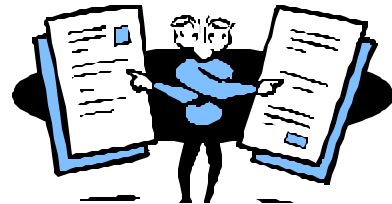
Mary Lou Addor, *Natural Resources Leadership Institute*
Juliana Birkhoff, *RESOLVE*

**May 29, 2003 Meeting Agenda
6:00 - 9:30 pm.**

- I. Welcome and Instructions
 - A. Introductions & Announcements
 - B. Meeting Agenda Objectives
 - C. Review of Ground Rules
 - D. Review of Decision-Making Criteria
 - E. May 6th Meeting Summary Approval
- II: Searching for Agreement
 - A. Review of Tentative Agreements
 - B. Continue Discussion on Alternative 5 Proposed Improvements.
 - C. Seek Agreement on Package of Improvements to Alternative 5.
- III: Next Steps

May 29th Handouts Provided

1. May 29th Draft Meeting Agenda
2. May 6th Draft Meeting Summary
3. Meleski Matrix
4. Liaison Panel Decision-Making Tool
5. EIS Impact Statement Draft Template – Alternative 5



Decisions Made:

1. Approved May 6th Meeting Summary
2. Liaison Panel chose Alternative 5 as the Desired Future Condition for the Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.
3. Liaison Panel provided recommendations to the US Forest Service on the Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. See pages 7-10 for more details.
4. Liaison Panel will meet September 27th to discuss proposals for next steps. An agenda will follow.

I. WELCOME & INSTRUCTIONS

A. Welcome and Announcements

1. Welcome: Mary Lou Addor (Natural Resources Leadership Institute), and Juliana Birkhoff (RESOLVE), introduced themselves, welcomed the Liaison Panel members, and other guests present who then also introduced themselves.
2. Announcements: Mary Lee Ratliff, Liaison Panel member could not attend the meeting but contacted the facilitators to inform the Panel she in support of Alternative 5 as the Desired Future Condition, the recommendations the Panel agreed on May 6, and agrees to during the May 29th meeting.

B. Meeting Agenda Objectives

The meeting objectives are to:

1. Review Liaison Panel decision-making criteria.
2. Continue discussion on proposed improvements to Alternative 5.
3. Seek agreement on package of improvements to a specific alternative.

4. Identify next steps

C. Review of Liaison Panel Ground Rules:

Ground rules of the Liaison Panel adopted at the February 11, 2003 meeting. *Liaison Panel Group Charter attached as Appendix A.*

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.
4. People will avoid extended comments and questions to allow everyone a fair chance to speak and to contribute.
5. Each person will try to stay on track with the agenda, to respect time limits, and to move the deliberations forward.
6. People should expect, respect, and try to accept different interests, perspectives, and opinions.
7. Everyone will limit sidebar conversations.

8. Members will engage actively – share information ideas and concerns.
9. To decide, 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.
10. 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 try to offer an alternative proposal satisfactory to other members.
11. Members should remain at the table during deliberations to hear the full discussions so their judgments are informed when decision-making occurs. Members may also choose not to consent on a decision, but to abstain without offering dissent.
12. Absence will be equivalent to abstaining.

D. Review Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel (BNFLP) Decision-Making Criteria

The Liaison Panel developed a list of decision-making criteria to assist them in determining the desired future condition of the forest and the immediate restoration focus for the next five years.

1. Future users will say the BNFLP did a good job.
2. BNFLP 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 all 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. Use of prescribed fire is based on fuel load and/or timeframe.

E. May 6th Meeting Summary

Liaison Panel approved the May 6th Meeting Summary without changes. This meeting summary and previous meeting summaries including presentations are posted on the Natural Resources Leadership Institute website at: www.ces.ncsu.edu/NRLI

II. SEARCHING FOR AGREEMENT

A. Review of Tentative Agreements

On May 6th the Bankhead Liaison Panel began searching for ways to improve Alternative 5 in order to meet their respective and collective interests. The tentative agreements of the Liaison Panel were:

1. Acres for Thinning
The Panel agreed to no changes in the total acres identified for thinning in Area 1, Area 2, or Area 3.
2. Acres for Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) Treatment
The Panel agreed to no changes in the total acres identified for SPB treatment in Area 1, Area 2, or Area 3.
 - a. The US Forest Service is not anticipating any major SPB problems for the next 3 years or more. When the upcoming thinning cycle is completed, the stands should not be as susceptible to southern pine beetle.
 - b. The acres in Area 1 not addressed in this EIS, are not a high risk and will be addressed in 5 years.

3. Management Practices for Thinning and Treatment

- a. The Panel understands herbicides are not viable for this EIS, and cannot be added since this option was not scoped. A separate proposal about invasive species does include the use of herbicides.
- b. The experts who spoke to the Liaison Panel on March 8 suggested fuel load as a potential decision-making criteria for prescribed burns as well as the need to be conduct prescribed burn more frequently at first, and then less frequently over time. The original alternative said 3 years, but this sequence offers more flexibility. The 3-5 year range is ok for oak woodlands; approximately 10 years for some of the rest; and no burning on other parts.
- c. The Panel recommends a participatory monitoring process on the thinning and management practices, one that will include liaison panel members and researchers to help track and monitor events.
- d. The Panel recommends the USFS wherever possible, explores new methods and technologies to minimize environmental impacts.
- e. The Panel recommends the USFS continues to use best management practices to minimize impacts, in whatever way the USFS can identify.

B. Continued Discussion on Alternative 5 Proposed Improvements

The Liaison Panel decided at the May 6th meeting that they could not discuss different aspects of multiple alternatives at the same time. They agreed to focus their discussions on Alternative 5 (a desired future condition) and consider one aspect of the alternative at a time. Each alternative (there are a total of six Alternatives including the first one which is not change in current status on the Bankhead), has many similarities yet emphasizes a

different forest composition for the long-term health of the forest and immediate restoration of site-specific areas. Alternative 5 integrates many stakeholders' preferences and addresses concerns identified during the scoping process.

The group reviewed the "**Meleski Matrix**," which organizes key information about each of the alternatives on a single sheet of paper. *Attached as Appendix B.*

Using the attached **Liaison Panel Decision-making Tool**, the Panel continued its discussion on elements of Alternative Five, indicating modifications they would like to see in order for Alternative 5 to meet their respective and collective interests. *Attached as Appendix C.*

Areas of Discussion were:

1. Revise Percentages of Desired Future Conditions.

Discussion on establishment of the short-leaf blue stem community in Area 2 centered on whether long-term growth of short-leaf would establish the endangered species, the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) populations, in the Bankhead. If so, the concern for this forest type is the impacts management for RCW would have on private landowners, within and surrounding the Bankhead. Although private land owners have a good working relationship with wildlife regulatory agencies working on the Bankhead, there is concern about the potential for new management strategies that may restrict private land use. Points conveyed from various Panel members were:

- a. **Various community types enhance RCW establishment:** the current forest community type on the Bankhead, the loblolly, can attract RCW populations just as other forest community types can. It is the age and basal area of the tree that typically enhances RCW's ability to thrive.

In addition, the Bankhead National Forest is separated from existing populations of RCW so it is highly unlikely an RCW population could be established in the Bankhead.

- b. **Purpose is to establish the short-leaf on the Bankhead:** purpose for the short-leaf/bluestem woodland community is to establish a forest type community not available on private property, one which is long-lived and characterized as having open woodland conditions, with occasional small gaps.
- c. **Increase Wildlife and Plantlife:** area for consideration in Area 2 is 772 acres that may look even-aged when planted but will not act even-aged. The area will increase areas for wildlife and certain plants.
- d. **Decision is Reversible:** the 772 acres will be monitored during the 5 year time-frame. Since fire is necessary for the short-leaf community, removal of fire source will allow area to revert to upland hardwoods and hardwood pine.
- e. **Adaptive Management:** the Panel subscribes to an adaptive management approach so in order to increase learning, the small area must be tested (772 acres).
- f. **Maximum 38%:** accept not more than 38% short-leaf/bluestem woodland if deemed appropriate for the Area 2.

The Panel agreed to monitor and manage appropriately the testing area for the short-leaf/bluestem woodlands during the first 5-years and prior to moving forward to establish the 38% of short-leaf for the desired future condition.

2. Recommendations on Management Actions to Protect Special Habitats (wildlife openings, etc.)

The Liaison Panel discussed the need to protect wildlife habitat throughout the major areas of the

restoration initiative. The Liaison Panel also discussed its potential to provide recommendations on removal of some roads or access areas. Because road removal was not included in the scoping process and is included in the decommission component of the Bankhead Forest Management Plan, it would be problematic to include this issue and recommendations in the current EIS. The discussion included reasons for closing access areas where the access area impacts wildlife habitat or degrades water quality through erosion; the potential use of existing and inactive roads for wildlife enhancement through openings and for use as firebreaks; and the potential to create a temporary road for a site specific area that could be rehabbed. At a later time, the Liaison Panel would like to revisit discussion on the topic of access areas.

3. Recommendations on Management Actions to Protect Heritage Resources

The focus of the discussion was on working closely with established cultural groups such as the Echota Cherokee and the Warrior Mountain Culture and Historical Society. The Echota Cherokee Cultural Group meets to discuss tribal issues and only tribal members can speak & make decisions during these meetings. The Warrior Mountain Culture and Historical Society meets to discuss tribal and non-tribal issues.

4. Monitoring (who, when, how, for what indicators) for Area 1, Area 2, & Area 3.

The Panel discussed the need to monitor every aspect of the forest health and restoration initiative through community working groups who would work in tandem with the US Forest Service and academic researchers.

Some specific suggestions for academic researchers included Callie Schweitzer (who is locally based) as adjunct faculty at A&M University and at the Southern Research Station; the Cowetta Hydrologic Research Station; Dale Brockway with the Southern Research Station; Jonathan Evans from the University of the South;

and David Loftis from the Bent Creek Research Station.

In addition, the suggestion was made for the Nature Conservancy to chair the Desired Future Conditions Working Group since monitoring is an area of expertise for the non-profit organization. In further discussion, it was suggested that all members associated with a working group should discuss membership and leadership criteria and then agree on the criteria that worked best for that working group and its goals. For example – a working group criterion might be “commitment level to the working group including the ability to attend meetings, willingness to work with the group, and contribute to its goals”; or another criterion might be the “specific area of expertise offered to the working group”.

C. Seek Agreements on Package of Improvements to Alternative 5

See page 7-10 for recommended improvements to Alternative 5 (the Desired Future Condition) agreed upon by the Liaison Panel for the US Forest Service Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. Each of the Liaison Panel members present said they could live with the recommendations as proposed or better, especially considering the ongoing working relationship with each other and the US Forest Service through future Liaison Panel meetings and working group activities.

Consensus Decision-Making Scale

5. I can give an unqualified yes to the decision. I am excited or enthusiastic about it.
4. I can live with the decision. It is OK with me.
3. I am concerned about this decision but will not block the group.
2. I think there is a major problem with the decision and choose to block the group's action.
1. It is too soon to make any decision. More work needs to be done or information gathered.

III: NEXT STEPS

A. Agreement Document: the recommendations provided by the Liaison Panel will be distributed in the May 29th Meeting Summary to all Panel members and their alternates, including the US Forest Service, the US Institute for Environmental Negotiation, Directors of the Natural Resources Leadership Institute and RESOLVE.

B. Meeting Summary/Agreement Document Review Timeline:

The Liaison Panel is requested to review the meeting summary and recommendations on or before noon on June 10, 2003. If there are any concerns, please contact Mary Lou Addor at: Mary_Addor@ncsu.edu or 919.515.9602 to discuss. If Mary Lou does not hear from you on or before noon on June 10th, the USFS will move forward to incorporate the Liaison' Panel's recommendations as attached into the EIS document (example of EIS document distributed to each member at the May 29th meeting). For additional copies of the EIS template, contact John Creed at the Bankhead District Office).

C. Capacity Building and Partnerships: Mary Lou and Juliana will work with their respective organizations, the USFS, and the US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution to develop several proposals that can support the capacity building efforts of the Liaison Panel and its working groups, and be prepared to present those on September 27 to the Liaison Panel (agenda follow).

**Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel Decision-Making Tool:
Recommendations to the US Forest Service for the
Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Initiative in Alabama**

The Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel has chosen Alternative 5 as the Desired Future Condition for the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative in Alabama. This alternative proposes to implement a five-year schedule of work to emphasize forest health and restoration of Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) damaged stands by thinning overstocked loblolly pine stands and reforesting SPB damaged stands. Emphasis would be placed on six native upland forest community types, including all associated plant and wildlife species, on the Bankhead National Forest located in Winston, Lawrence, and Franklin Counties, Alabama. **The proposed action would focus on:**

- Areas currently occupied by loblolly pine stands between the ages of 15 and 45 years old.
- Areas 10 acres and larger killed by SPB infestations.

The proposed action addresses the need to improve and maintain healthy forest conditions and provide for fire dependent forest communities that are historically a part of the Southern Cumberland Plateau ecosystem in this geographic region, but are no longer present. The proposed action includes:

- Intermediate thinning on approximately 9,452 acres of loblolly pine stands.
- Silvicultural site preparation of SPB impacted areas to better insure successful reforestation efforts.
- Natural and artificial reforestation to restore SPB impacted areas on approximately 6,860 acres.

No treatments are proposed in the Proposed Botanical Area, the Historic Districts, or the Cultural Study Areas (see Alternative 5 map). A complete listing of the areas proposed for treatment and the treatment proposed for each, including descriptions of the forest community types are located in the Environmental Impact Statement. Alternative 5 describes the Desired Future Conditions (DFC) by dividing the forest into three separate geographic areas- Area 1, Area 2, and Area 3. Following are the recommendations provided to the US Forest Service from the Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel for Area 1, Area 2, and Area 3 based on the respective treatment for the next 5 years.

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION - ALTERNATIVE 5	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Reduce/Increase/No Change Acres for Thinning	No change	No change	No change
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Reduce/Increase/No Change Acres for SPB Treatment	No change	No change	No change

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Recommendations on Management Practices for Thinning and Treatment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess prescribed burning to reduce forest fuel buildup, create open woodland conditions, and enhance wildlife habitat, on a three to five year rotation for oak woodlands, approximately ten years for some of the rest. The prescribed burns may occur more frequently at the beginning of the restoration work, less frequently later. 2. USFS staff will explore, and wherever possible use, new techniques and technologies to minimize environmental impact from thinning and treatment work. 3. USFS staff will continue to use best management practices to minimize impacts. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess prescribed burning to reduce forest fuel buildup, create open woodland conditions, and enhance wildlife habitat, on a three to five year rotation for oak woodlands, approximately ten years for some of the rest. The prescribed burns may occur more frequently at the beginning of the restoration work, less frequently later. 2. USFS staff will explore, and wherever possible use, new techniques and technologies to minimize environmental impact from thinning and treatment work. 3. USFS staff will continue to use best management practices to minimize impacts. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess prescribed burning to reduce forest fuel buildup, create open woodland conditions, and enhance wildlife habitat, on a three to five year rotation for oak woodlands, approximately ten years for some of the rest. The prescribed burns may occur more frequently at the beginning of the restoration work, less frequently later. 2. USFS staff will explore, and wherever possible use, new techniques and technologies to minimize environmental impact from thinning and treatment work. 3. USFS staff will continue to use best management practices to minimize impacts.
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Revise Percentages of Desired Future Conditions	No change	Closely monitor the success of the initial 772 acres of shortleaf pine through the first 5 years of restoration work. Rigorously assess short leaf pine restoration before pursuing desired future condition of 38% short leaf –bluestem forest community.	No change.

	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Recommendations on Management Actions to Protect Special Habitats (wildlife openings, etc.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anticipate impact on recreation areas and users and plan to mitigate impacts. 2. Explore use of existing access roads for fire breaks and wildlife openings. 3. Protect species in all three areas. 4. Develop and implement management practices to increase early successional habitat to 10%. Spread successional habitat throughout Area 1 to increase transition zones and habitat interfaces. Management practices may include prescribed burns, thinning, and maintenance of existing roads for wildlife openings, as appropriate for site and species. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anticipate impact on recreation areas and users and plan to mitigate impacts. 2. Explore use of existing roads for fire breaks and wildlife openings. 3. Protect species in all three areas. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anticipate impact on recreation areas and users and plan to mitigate impacts. 2. Explore use of existing roads for fire breaks and wildlife openings. 3. Protect species in all three areas.
	Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
Recommendations on Management Actions to Protect Heritage Resources	Work actively and consistently with Liaison Panel, Echota Cherokee Cultural Heritage Committee, the Warrior Mountain Culture and Historical Society, and any contractual vendors to protect cultural and heritage sites from negative impacts from restoration work.	Work actively and consistently with Liaison Panel, Echota Cherokee Cultural Heritage Committee, the Warrior Mountain Culture and Historical Society, and any contractual vendors to protect cultural and heritage sites from negative impacts from restoration work.	Work actively and consistently with Liaison Panel, Echota Cherokee Cultural Heritage Committee, the Warrior Mountain Culture and Historical Society, and any contractual vendors to protect cultural and heritage sites from negative impacts from restoration work.

Monitoring (who, when, how, for what indicators) for Area 1, Area 2, & Area 3.

1. USFS will monitor impact of health and restoration activities on indicator species, including aquatic, threatened and endangered species.
2. USFS will work actively with academic and research communities to monitor, assess, and learn from health and restoration activities; to approach health and restoration initiative as a “learning lab”.
3. Create community based work groups to monitor progress and performance each aspect of the health and restoration work. These Work Groups will be accountable - members will participate actively, attend meetings/field trips as needed, document learnings and monitoring observations, follow through on action items, interface with the USFS staff and report to the Liaison Panel. The work groups will establish a operating structure that allows them to be accountable, to follow-through, and focus on monitoring.
 - a. **Timber and Thinning Performance Work Group** will work with USFS to ensure thinning work is performed according to best management practices and contract specifications. Monitoring group will look over thinning operations and work with USFS to develop approaches to overcome challenges of accomplishing work with least environmental impacts.
 - b. **Recreation Work Group** will work with USFS to monitor restoration work impact on recreation sites and users, will help notify recreation users of restoration work, and develop approaches to mitigate negative impacts on recreation users and sites from restoration work.
 - c. **Cultural and Historic Work Group** will assist as needed USFS staff with survey work, will work with USFS to monitor impact of restoration activities on cultural and historic sites.
 - d. **Wildlife Work Group** will work with USFS to monitor impact of restoration activities on wildlife and develop approaches to protecting wildlife and enhancing habitat.
 - e. **Desired Future Conditions Work Group** will work with USFS and academic partners to monitor the restoration activities, burning impacts, pest and disease of treatment areas, monitor health of short leaf experiments and long leaf pine plantings, and monitor success of oak forest and oak woodlands transition.