

Bankhead Liaison Panel Meeting Summary January 23, 2003

Bank Building – Double Springs, AL

Approved for general distribution, 2/11/03.

Attendance

Liaison Panel Members:

Colin Bagwell, *Consulting Forester*
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*
Quinton Humphries, *Winston Co. Commission*
Randall Lou Allen, *Lawrence Co. Commission*
Vince Meleski, *Wild Alabama*
Mary Lee Ratliff, *Recreation*
Bill Snoddy, *Treasure Forest Landowner*
Johnny Dean Warren, *Resident*
Lori Wilson, *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service*

Interested People/ Other Attendees:

Sheron Ball
Janet Campbell
Allen Ray Cantrell
Joe Copeland
L.C. Hall
Anthony Hood
Jim Hughes
Mike Henshaw
Gordon Pigg
Jeff Still
Gary White
Orvis White
Athel Wilhite

USFS Personnel:

Allison Cochran, *Bankhead District*
Tom Counts, *Bankhead District*
Glen Gaines, *District Ranger*
James Gooder, *Forest Supervisor*

Facilitation Staff:

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

January 23, 2003 Meeting Agenda 6:00 – 9:30 p.m.

Pre-Meeting Open House (5:00 – 6:00 p.m.)

1. Welcome by Facilitators and Ground Rules for the Meeting
2. Situation Assessment Findings (thus far)
3. Overview of the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative and Collaborative Process
4. Introductions
5. Questions and Answers
6. Ground Rules
7. Membership
8. Next Steps

Post-Meeting Informal Q & A Period (until 10 p.m.)

Handouts Provided

1. Cover Letter (announcing Jan. 23 meeting)
2. Meeting Agenda: January 23
3. Situation Assessment Findings (thus far)
4. Draft Ground Rules



Decisions Made:

1. Decided to add new members to the Liaison Panel.
2. Appointed a Steering Committee to develop meeting agendas, review proposals for new Liaison Panel members, and suggest dates and issues for meetings going forward.

Action Items:

1. Each Liaison Panel will appoint an alternate by the next meeting.
2. RESOLVE/NRLI will gather the Steering Committee to discuss additional Liaison Panel members, possible items for the next two meeting agendas, and a game plan going forward.
3. RESOLVE/NRLI will attempt to contact those Panel members not present as well as potential Panel members suggested by the group.

I. FACILITATORS' WELCOME, MEETING GROUND RULES, AND AGENDA

A. Facilitators' Welcome and Roles

Mary Lou Addor and Juliana Birkhoff introduced themselves and welcomed those present.

They explained that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (USIECR) invited them to interview people interested in the Bankhead Forest. They also gathered perspectives on the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative, and will write a report capturing what they learned.

The USFS and USIECR also asked them to convene and facilitate a process for building consensus among those interested in the forest that could be incorporated into the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.

Mary Lou explained the facilitators' role as including the following elements:

- Move the deliberations along
- Keep the group on task
- Seek active involvement and broad input
- Ensure time commitments are met
- Keep group memory

B. Ground Rules and Agenda

Mary Lou proposed the following ground rules for the meeting:

- One person speaks at a time
- Respect time limits
- Focus on the task at hand
- Expect, respect, and accept different interests, perspectives, and opinions
- Limit sidebar conversations
- Participate actively – share information, ideas, and concerns

Juliana then reviewed the agenda.

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

II. SITUATION ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

Juliana reviewed the handout outlining what they had heard in their interviews so far. For more details, please see that handout (attached).

III. REVIEW OF THE FOREST HEALTH AND RESTORATION INITIATIVE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS -WITH- QUESTION/ANSWER SESSION

District Ranger Glen Gaines spoke about the Liaison Panel, the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative, and their relationship to the forest management plan. Here are the key points to the discussion:

A. Ranger Gaines' Opening Comments

Glen is proud of the Liaison Panel, its process, and the support that people have shown for it. His goal is to have people at the table participating, to build on the relationships the Panel has developed, and to continue to take on tough projects.

B. Forest Management Plan

The National Forest Management Act requires the USFS to create a Forest Plan to provide broad guidance, similar to zoning, on issues such as land management, forest management, wildlife, recreation, water, and resources. The Forest Service usually revises a Forest Plan every 10-15 years, but the current Plan has been in effect since 1986. Glen and his staff are developing the Forest Plan in cooperation with four other districts in the Southern Appalachian region. The "project-level" work the Liaison Panel has discussed and will continue to discuss helps to apply that general guidance "on the ground."

Q Haven't we been working on this for 3-4 years already?

R Yes, but the Plan is almost ready. A draft is due Feb. 15. Later, there will be a 90-day period of public comment on the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The final Plan is due out Dec. 15, 2003.

C. Forest Health and Restoration Initiative

The Forest Health and Restoration Initiative (FHRI) requires that decisions are made in three major areas:

1. The desired condition of the forest (i.e. what forests will be there, and what will the forest look like).
2. Treatment alternatives (for example, where and how often to use prescribed burning)

3. A five-year program of priority projects (for example, dealing with Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) and reducing stands' risks by thinning and/or restoring).

The Forest Health and Restoration Initiative will address the questions, "Where are we going?" "How will we get there?" and, "What needs to be done most urgently?"

Though the FHRI will not deal directly with cultural or recreational issues (for example, by making specific decisions on trails), Glen stressed that the FHRI will affect anyone using the forest. He hopes that those with cultural, recreational, and other interests will be active in this process, understanding that those specific issues will not be discussed until after the FHRI.

Timeline: The USFS is analyzing the [six] draft alternatives and collecting field information on Threatened and Endangered (T&E) species. The goal is to have a draft EIS out June 21. (People who commented will have a copy sent to them. Others who are interested can come to the ranger station to see a copy.) The public comment period will end July 25, and a final decision will be made by September 30.

Q Why can't the Forest Service just pick the alternative for what the forest is supposed to be like?

R Many things could be in the forest, and each of the five alternatives would work. There is no one scientific answer. The USFS wants to involve people to get the best ideas to come up with a plan that people will support.

Q Do we know what was there before?

R [Discussion of what "native" means.] Any of the five alternatives would work, but each has an impact that has to be weighed.

Q Does it matter what we say or what science says? Won't the USFS just decide, anyway?

R The current alternatives and maps are all based on public involvement. We addressed your concerns in the alternatives. In the past, the USFS just made its own decisions without consulting many people. That caused mistrust and other problems. Now the USFS is trying a different approach. The final expectation is not that everyone is 100% happy, but that we understand the outcome and that people know the USFS is listening.

C Everyone must compromise.

C Sometimes groups can come up with new alternatives that meet everyone's interests even better. This group is smart and hardworking enough to do that.

Q Do these alternatives come with budgets?

R No. The procedure is to get the plans in place and then hope/expect the funding will come.

Q Is there an alternative that allows for timber sales?

R All but one uses commercial timber sales to thin.

Q Will there be timber sales as part of the desired future condition?

R Those sales currently are allowed in the Forest Plan.

C The first step is to agree on the desired future condition of the forest. Then, the conflict comes in with how we achieve those conditions (for example, by timber sales).

C Glen and Forest Supervisor Jim Gooder said that this is the only such large-scale public involvement process for an FHRI that they know of in any of the 122 National Forests. They hope that the Liaison Panel can be an example for others to follow.

IV. INTRODUCTIONS

Each Liaison Panel member introduced themselves briefly, saying what they hoped to gain from taking part in the project. Then, Mary Lou and Juliana invited others who were present to introduce themselves, if they wanted.

V. GROUND RULES

Based on the concerns and suggestions that interviewees had about how to make the group work more productively, the facilitators developed a set of draft ground rules. The facilitators reviewed those draft ground rules (see the attached handout) and invited feedback from the group. Comments are welcome by email (mary_addor@ncsu.edu; jbirkhoff@resolv.org), fax (919-515-1824), or post (NRLI, North Carolina State University, Box 8109, 4548 Nelson Hall, Raleigh, NC 27695-8109).

Q What is meant by "consensus"?

R Consensus means there is no dissent by any members. Granting consent means that each member can live with the decision and support its implementation. It does not mean everything you wanted or that you are necessarily wildly enthusiastic about it – just that it does not give you 'heartburn.'

We will use a five-point scale to see how close we are to consensus:

5: Love it.

4: Like it.

3: Can live with it.

2: Abstain. (Don't like it, but won't block the group.)

1: Don't like it. Will block the group.

Consensus is when everyone is at levels 2-5.

Q What happens if we don't reach consensus?

R If one or more parties are at level 1, and the group is unable to come up with a

consensus alternative, the group may decide to continue while making clear in any written or verbal communication that consensus was not achieved.

Q How often will the Panel meet between now and June?

R At least monthly.

Juliana and Mary Lou sketched a visual outlining the proposed process by which the Liaison Panel can reach a consensus alternative for the FHRI by the June deadline. The key parts of the timeline are as follows:

- USFS will decide on a draft plan for the FHRI by June 21. If the Liaison Panel is to give a consensus recommendation, it needs to arrive at it before then.
- The Panel will meet six times between now and then, with the following broad agendas:
 - #1: Organizing the Panel
 - #2: Group Learning I
 - #3: Group Learning II
 - #4: Developing Criteria for a Decision
 - #5: Developing Options and Bargaining
 - #6: Coming to Consensus
- Working groups will be created and charged by the Panel to delve into issues in greater depth between meetings as needed. Working groups will consist of at least one Panel member and may include non-Panel members, as well. Working groups are a good way for people who are not on the Panel to help with the FHRI.
- A Steering Committee of 2-3 Panel members will meet with the facilitators and Glen by conference call before each Panel meeting. Their role will be to set agendas for each Panel meeting and to look strategically at the overall process.
- A public education event will be held once the Panel has developed some options, probably in April or May.

VI. MEMBERSHIP

The facilitators asked the Panel to “look around the table,” confirm their membership, and to decide if any key stakeholder groups that needed to be represented were missing.

Stakeholder Groups Not Represented

1. Tourism interests
2. Industrial development interests.
3. Trail riders (as opposed to endurance riders)
4. Environmental groups representing flora and fauna
5. Local historical/Native American perspective
6. Scientific specialists

The group also discussed alternatives to having additional specialists as Panel members. They could serve in various working groups, on a special Scientific Resource Group, or form a scientific panel with contending viewpoints.

- C Panel members need to be people who are critically involved in the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative and who have the authority or ability to block implementation of an agreement or have a critical role in implementing a consensus agreement.
- C Serving on the Panel will take time and energy. Members must be passionate.
- A Juliana and Mary Lou agreed to follow up with potential Panel members suggested by the group. They will also attempt to contact the two Panel members not present this evening: Dr. Charles Borden and Greg Preston.
- A Mary Lou and Juliana will talk to the Steering Committee and come back to

the Panel for a decision on adding new members.

- A Juliana and Mary Lou also asked that each Panel Member come to the next meeting prepared to identify their alternate.

VII. NEXT STEPS: Steering Committee

Mary Lou and Juliana explained the role of the Steering Committee (see Section V) and noted that it should include 2-3 Panel members who are strategic thinkers and who collectively represent a diversity of interests.

- A Five Panel members volunteered to serve on the Steering Committee: Margaret Dunn, Vince Meleski, Mary Lee Ratliff, Bill Snoddy, and Johnny Warren.
- A The Steering Committee was to schedule its first conference call following this meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.