



DECISION MEMO

Pearson Gap Burn Area Salvage 2009



USDA, Forest Service
National Forests in Alabama
Talladega National Forest – Oakmulgee District
Bibb County, Alabama

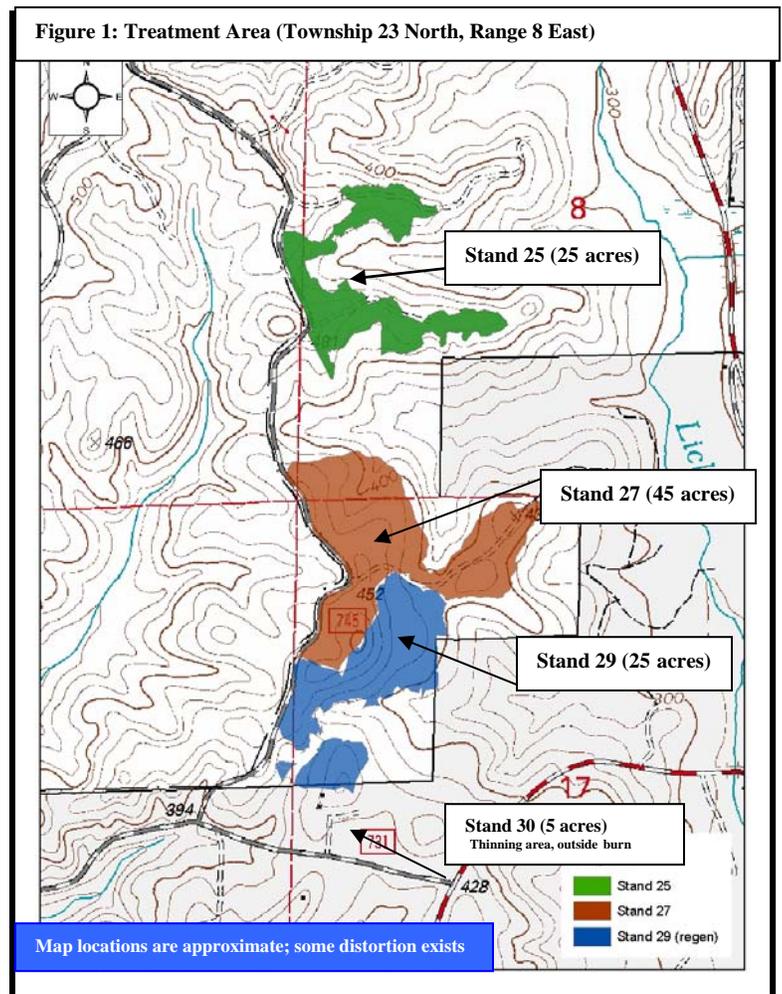
I have made a decision to treat approximately 75 acres, in two stands, for the removal of dead and/or dying trees through a salvage harvest treatment and re-establish the treated area to native longleaf conditions by artificial reforestation. (**Reference Figure 1: Treatment Area Map**). I am making this decision to accomplish the following:

- Continue to implement, to the extent possible, the intent of the Longleaf Ecosystem Restoration Project Record of Decision as signed February 2, 2005;
- Reduce the risk to public safety from falling trees;
- Reduce the risk of insect infestation;
- Reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires resulting from heavy fuels presented by the dead trees; and
- Reduce fuels such that prescribed fire can be maintained in the treatment areas without the risk of damage to the young trees from heavy fuels.

The trees in question were killed as a result of a prescribed burn conducted June 2008.

Planned Action: To treat in Stands 25 and 27 of Compartment 10 by removing dead and/or dying pine stems; and to follow removal treatment by planting native longleaf seedlings. The total area to be treated is approximately 70 acres.

The salvage harvest method is whole tree removal via chipping for biomass. Thus the need for site preparation will be eliminated.



Background: The stands to be treated were addressed for a range of restoration practices within the Longleaf Ecosystem Restoration EIS (Longleaf EIS). The treatments outlined in the Longleaf EIS were field validated, harvest units were identified, and a commercial timber sale was implemented. (Contract #: 04-001686) The areas in question were harvested in October, 2007. A prescribed burn was implemented on June 9, 2008 for the entire Compartment 10. The district had been experience severe drought for the previous 2 years. In addition the KBDI, which is an indicator of long term drought, was at 439 on a scale of 0-800. All prescription elements were within parameters except the KBDI. The unit received rain 2

days prior to ignition and it was thought that this would off-set the KBDI which was measured at a monitoring station 10 miles to the east of the burn unit.

The burn was started on the north end at Pearson Gap and proceed southeast down the Forest Road 745 through the day. Fire intensity increased as the burn entered the timber thinning area. During the burn operation all prescription elements remained within the prescription. While the prescribed burn fell within the established parameters, with the exception of KBDI, it is likely that a combination of the post-harvest conditions of logging debris, existing soil conditions, and afternoon changes in humidity, combined with the residual effects of the previous two-year drought allowed the fire in the thinned stands to “cook” the fine roots of the recently thinned stands.

The area was monitored throughout the remaining summer months and there were signs of possible recovery. However once the fall droughts passed it was evident that the trees would not recover. **Figure 2: Explanation of Changes from the Longleaf EIS**, lists the shifts in treatments from the planned action relative to those outlined in the Longleaf EIS.

Figure 2: Explanation of Changes from the Longleaf EIS					
Area of Concern	Stand	Forest Type	EIS Acres	Sale Acres	Notes:
3	25	Loblolly	66	25	Records indicate that this stand was established in 1965 as 66 acres of planted loblolly pine. Over time, hardwood encroachment and loss of initial planting stock caused the merchantable area to be reduced to 25 acres. This area was not as severely affected by the burn as the stands to the south. There will likely be a sparse stocking of longleaf overstory with an understory of planted longleaf resulting in a 2-aged stand.
4	27	Longleaf	50	45	There are some residual longleaf remaining in this stand, perhaps 10 sq ft/ac BA in places. Once under-planted with longleaf seedlings, it should become a 2-aged longleaf stand.
1	29	Loblolly	22	25	During the initial harvest, several longleaf trees were found in this area and were retained as seed trees to have a combined natural and artificial regeneration. Most of these seed trees were killed during the burn and the entire area will now be re-established by artificial regeneration. This action is covered by the Longleaf EIS and the planting contract is currently underway.
3	30	Loblolly	21	5	This area was excluded from the burn and not affected by this proposal.
			159	104	Summary: There will be a net increase of 25 acres restored to longleaf pine from planted loblolly on a native longleaf site. There will be a loss of a 40+ years old longleaf stand as it shifts to a 2-age stand of mostly early succession habitat and newly established seedlings.

Mitigation Measures: The planned action has been designed to include considerations for Forest Plan (Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan) standards. No areas lie within any Streamside Management Zone.

Appropriateness for Categorical Exclusion:

This action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an EIS or and EA because it is falls within the category 13 from Forest Service Handbook (FSH)1909.15, section 31.2: **(13) Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction. The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing. Examples include but are not limited to:**

- (i) Harvest of a portion of a stand damaged by a wind or ice event and construction of a short temporary road to access the damaged trees and
- (ii) Harvest of fire-damaged trees.

No new road construction is required or is necessary to implement this action. This action does not include the use of herbicides.

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment 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* - In accordance with FSM 2672.41 and FSH 2609.13, a Biological Evaluation (BE) has been prepared to evaluate the effects of the planned activities on PETS species. The planned actions should have a “not likely to adversely affect” determination for the RCW due to the project having entirely beneficial results. The planned actions will have “no effect” on other federally listed species. The USFWS has reviewed this determination and on February 23, 2009 responded with a concurrence letter.

The planned action has also been evaluated and has been determined to have a “no impact” determination for any of the species listed on the Regional Forester’s Sensitive species list.

- *Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds* – The planned treatment areas are not in a floodplain, wetland or municipal watershed and forest plan standards are implemented to prevent off-site impacts.
- *Congressionally designated 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 was completed by the University of Alabama – Office of Archeological Research under the Participating Agreement # 04-PA-11080104-065 prior to the initial timber sale. This survey was documented as Report # 2006-04-008 for Compartments 7, 10, 11, and 28. The findings were that ground disturbing activities in the planned treatment areas were determined not to be affected by the planned activities. Concurrence with these finding were received from the Alabama Historic Preservation Office on September 27, 2006.

The planned action has been evaluated for the potential of direct, indirect and cumulative resource impacts. None of the project areas are on steep slopes or highly erosive soil. Appropriate Forest Plan standards were applied in its design and no resource impacts were identified that could not be mitigated below significance.

Public Involvement: A legal notice of the 30-day comment period was posted in the *Tuscaloosa News* on February 10, 2009, the paper of record for the Oakmulgee District. The pre-decision document was e-mailed to 33 interested publics and hard copy mailed to eight parties. Seven responses were received, all in support of the planned action. A list of the agencies, organizations, and persons contacted is in the project folder and available upon request.

Findings Required by Other Laws:

National Forest Management Act: This decision is consistent with the Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan goals, objectives and standards. Specifically this project meets Forest Plan goal #1, Objective 1.2 (Forest Plan page 2-9) of restore and maintain upland longleaf pine forests and woodland communities and it supports Forest Plan Goal #3 of managing existing forest communities to reduce the risk from insects and disease. (Forest Plan page 2-10)

Forest Wide Standard 51 states that the maximum size of an opening created by even-aged or two-aged regeneration is 80 acres for southern yellow pine. These acreage limits do not apply to areas treated as a result of natural catastrophic conditions such as fire, insect or disease attack, or windstorm.

Clean Water Act: The RFLMP contains direction to ensure all projects comply with the requirements of the Clean Water Act. Therefore by following that direction, this project is in compliance with the Clean Water Act.

Appeal Rights- No substantive comments were received as a result of public involvement and 30-day public notice, therefore no party has an established appeal right.

Implementation – The project will be implemented within the next 10 days.

Contact Person- For additional information contact Jessica Blackwell at 9901 Highway 5 South, Brent, Alabama 35034 or Phone (205) 926-9765 (ext 205), E-mail: jessicablackwell@fs.fed.us.

Responsible Official:

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Cynthia O. Ragland

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District Ranger

Oakmulgee District

Talladega National Forest

Date:

March 11, 2009

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