

**BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST
LIAISON PANEL MEETING SUMMARY
December 1, 2011
DOUBLE SPRINGS, ALABAMA**

Liaison Panel Members Attendees

Anthony Hood, Recreation User
Mark Kolinski, Wild South
Mike Henshaw, Al. Coop Extension
Randy Feltman, Logging Interest
Ron Eakes, Al. WL & Freshwater Fish
Jeff Still, Warrior Mtn. Trail Rdrs
Chuck Byrd, TNC
Dr Charles Borden, Forest Landowner/Rec
Jody Buttrum, Recreation
LaVerne Matheson, Smith Lake Advocacy
Daryl Lawson, Al. A&M University

Additional Attendees

Mitchell Marks
John Howell
John Montgomery
Ron Hill
Mike Bagwell
James Alexander
Janice Barrett
Larry Barkey
Mimi Barkey
Doug Ripley
Barbara Crow and Mr. Crow

Forest Service Attendees

Elrand Denson, District Ranger
Allison Cochran, District Wildlife Biologist
Terrance Fletcher, District ORA
Lorenzo Walton, Forester Trainee

Blake Addison, District TMA
Kerry Clark, District FMO
Paul Gilliland, AFMO

Meeting Agenda

6:00	Welcome	Elrand Denson, District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:05	2011 Accomplishments & Program Update	Bankhead Staff
7:05	Trails Update - Horse Trail Assessment & Sipsey Wilderness Clearing	Terrance Fletcher, ORA, Bankhead
	Sipsey Wilderness Ranger Program	Mark Kolinski Alabama Program Manager, Wild South
7:25	Rush-Brushy Watershed Action Plan Watershed Condition Class Assessment & Action Plan	Elrand Denson, District Ranger, Bankhead
	Rush-Brushy Fuels Reduction Project	Blake Addison, Timber Management Assistant, Bankhead National Forest
7:45	Hardwood Restoration Workshop & Field Day	Mark Kolinski Wild South

8:00	Closeout Next meeting & agenda items Panel business items	Elrand Denson, District Ranger
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Presentations & Summary of Discussion:

Ranger Denson opened the meeting and reviewed the Bankhead Liaison Panel Ground Rules.

Each staff area reviewed their 2011 program accomplishments including fire, timber and silviculture, wildlife and recreation.

Discussion around the Bankhead accomplishments included:

- 376 6th graders in Winston County attended the Winston County Natural Resources Council's FAWN program at Houston Recreation Area.
- Question: What is Bankhead's growing season prescribed burning target? There is no specific target for acres included in growing season burns. We prioritize and target the Quail Emphasis Areas and other areas in AREA 3 with a longleaf woodland DFC.
- Question: What is the prescribed burn return interval? 2-3 years = short rotation and 8-10 years = long rotation.
- Question: Which non-native invasive species (NNIS) were treated? Primary species included privet, bicolor lespedeza, kudzu, autumn olive and mimosa. They were treated with glyphosate and the hack and squirt method. Bankhead uses an aquatic labeled glyphosate in many areas.

Terrance Fletcher provided an update on the Owl Creek Horse Trail Assessment. Questions included when a Horse Trail EA would begin and how long it will take. Ranger Denson stated the EA would probably start in the 3rd quarter. We will begin looking at the Horse Trail Assessment in January with the Liaison Panel and Horse Trail/Recreation Subcommittee. Dr. Borden expressed concern that he and other recreation interests had not been involved so far in the process. Staff will ensure all recreation interests are included on the subcommittee contact list.

Terrance also provided an update on the Sipsey Wilderness Trail Clearing contract. There were questions about Trail 224, which is not included in this contract. Trail

224 may be included in later funding efforts, if secured. There was a lot of discussion on how long it is taking to do the Wilderness trail clearing. Panel members asked if sections could be pulled from the contract and volunteers allowed to clear those portions. The answer to that question is no, volunteers will not be allowed to work on trails that are under contract and no sections will be pulled from the contract. Terrance updated the panel that the Sipsey Wilderness Trailhead Parking Lot project should begin this fiscal year.

A question was asked about putting up some kind of recognition of the volunteer groups around trail heads. This would allow Forest visitors to have contact information for volunteer groups if they are interested in helping with projects.

An issue was brought up about raising awareness among hikers and horseback riders about hunting seasons on the Black Warrior WMA and the need for visitors to wear hunter safety orange.

Mark Kolinski gave a brief presentation on the Wild South Wilderness Ranger volunteer program. Wild South received a matching grant from the National Forest Foundation for the Wilderness Ranger Program. Thirty five individuals have been recruited for the program. After extensive training, Wilderness volunteers will patrol the Sipsey, Dugger and Cheaha Wilderness Areas on Alabama's National Forests 2 days/month. The four day training program included information on Wilderness Act, ethics, the 5 qualities of Wilderness character, Leave No Trace, GPS, Forest Service radio use, first aid, cpr, and detailed information on Alabama's wilderness areas. The rangers will educate and inform visitors and report violations to Forest Service law enforcement. The volunteer rangers will also perform light trail maintenance and naturalize dispersed campsites.

Ranger Denson presented information on the Watershed Condition Classification and associated Watershed Restoration Action Plan (WRAP) process for National Forests. He presented highlights and key objectives of the Rush-Brushy Watershed Restoration Action Plan. Needed actions in the watershed include Owl Creek Horse Trail projects, road and trail projects, non-native invasive species control, projects to improve the fire condition class (mechanical fuels reduction, commercial thinning and prescribed burning), and increasing large woody debris for aquatic habitat. Blake Addison presented a proposal for a new project in the Rush-Brushy watershed to commercially thin +/- 3,000 acres during the WRAP 5 year project period. The project's goal is to restore native systems to improve function

and resiliency, improve fire regime condition class and wildlife habitat, and reduce hazardous fuel loadings. Through the Rush-Brushy WRAP, loblolly pine stands between 15 - 55 years old that were omitted from the Forest Health & Restoration Project EIS were identified for thinning.

A question was asked about how the WRAP relates to the "Next Step Forest Health Environmental Assessments" entry process. Will we still be doing Watershed EA's? The WRAP looks at focusing our projects in the Rush-Brushy Watershed. A portion of our normal program of work will be identified in the Rush-Brushy watershed. We will still be doing Watershed EA's.

A concern from the public was raised that understory removal, thinning and burning will dry out the forest and cause crown fires which we don't have here. A great deal of discussion around woodland restoration and the benefits of restored woodlands on a number of natural resources (wildlife habitat, water production, reduced catastrophic wildfires, etc) ensued. This topic was also discussed at the Hardwood Restoration workshop and field day.

Mark Kolinski gave a brief overview of the sites visited and topics discussed at the September Liaison Panel Hardwood Workshop and Field Day.

LaVerne Matheson notified the panel that the Rock Creek Watershed Project is moving forward and a public meeting about the Project is scheduled for Dec. 6th in Addison.

A question from the public was raised about the aerial ignition spheres used when helicopter burning. A hiker found a number of the "ping pong ball" devices and wondered what they were and the environmental effects of them. Kerry Clark described that the devices are filled with potassium permanganate and when they are injected with glycol they ignite. Ordinarily, the spheres burn up. In one burn, where the hiker observed them, there was a malfunction with the machine that dispenses the ignition spheres and a number of them were dropped without igniting.

Ron Eakes retired from the Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources - Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division on November 30, 2011. Ron has been a member of the Liaison Panel since its inception. Ranger Denson recognized Ron's years of service as a partner to the Bankhead National Forest with a certificate of appreciation.

Ron Eakes suggested that Jud Easterwood, his replacement as District Supervising Wildlife Biologist, join the Liaison Panel as the Ala. DCNR representative. The panel agreed.

The next meeting will be February 23 in Moulton. The specific location will be announced later. Agenda items suggested include the Owl Creek Horse Trail Assessment, Status update of the Wilderness Trail clearing contract, and a Restoration Monitoring Team report.

See attached pdf's for copies of all presentations.