

**BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST
LIAISON PANEL MEETING SUMMARY
FEBRUARY 23, 2012
MOULTON, ALABAMA**

Liaison Panel Members Attendees

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

Additional Attendees

Mitchell Marks
John Howell
John Ringer
Dawn Ringer
Mike Bagwell
James Alexander
Janice Barrett
Larry Barkey
Mimi Barkey
Donald Jones
Charles Peterson
Starlin Blankenship
Evon Crawford
Gary Crawford
Russell Miller
April Williams
Jason Williams
Franklin Turmey
Dave Morrill
Matt Breadwell
Cory Tucker
Justin Jacobs
John Mark Kirk

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
Travis McDonald, Biological Scientist

Meeting Agenda

6:00	Welcome	Elrand Denson, District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:10	Rush-Brushy Watershed Watershed Restoration Action Plan Commercial Thinning Proposal Stewardship Project Proposal	Bankhead Staff
7:30	Owl Creek Trail Assessment	Terrance Fletcher, ORA, USFS, Bankhead
8:00	Liaison Panel Restoration Team January Monitoring Tour Report	Mark Kolinski Alabama Program Manager Wild South
8:15	Closeout Next meeting & agenda items Panel business items	Elrand Denson, District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead

Presentations & Summary of Discussion:

Ranger Denson opened the meeting and reviewed the Bankhead Liaison Panel Ground Rules. Elrand introduced the Watershed Restoration Action Plans which are on the agenda. Elrand advised the panel that an Environmental Assessment on Hemlock Woolly Adelgid response will be forthcoming.

Allison Cochran, District Wildlife Biologist, shared a presentation on the **Watershed Condition Classification and the Rush-Brushy Watershed Restoration Action Plan** that was presented at the last Liaison Panel meeting. The powerpoint presentation is attached. Questions included (1) how the categories

which are used to classify watersheds are weighted; (2) how the classification and Action Plan tie into Bankhead's forest health restoration program and the desired future conditions; and (3) if a class 1 watershed can be improved. (1) The weighting/valuing of the attributes used to classify watershed condition is included in the powerpoint. (2) Blake addressed the desired future conditions for forest communities in Rush-Brushy in his presentation. (3) The goal for the Rush-Brushy watershed is to maintain and improve the Class 1 condition of the watershed.

Mark Kolinski raised the topic of the Canyon Corridor and Rare Communities Land Management Plan Prescriptions. Mark noted that these should be included in the Rush-Brushy Watershed Action Plan (WRAP).

Blake Addison, District Timber Management Assistant, shared a presentation on the proposed **Rush-Brushy Thinning project**, which was introduced at the last panel meeting. The powerpoint presentation is attached. Questions and comments included

- (1) Dr. Borden - Looks like the project plan for assessing which stands to treat and the treatment proposed is good. Monitoring should continue.
- (2) Discussion on cut and leave tree marking
- (3) Dr Borden's Question - After thinning and reducing the Basal Area of the pine stands, what is the next treatment and time frame? Discussion that it will take multiple treatments to get to the desired future condition. In 10 - 15 years, staff will re-enter the stands, assess the needs and prescribe the next treatment, likely another thinning. This led to Mark's question that part of the reason for the 55 - 70 Basal Area (BA) target is that we know we won't be in the stands again for a while. Elrand stated that is a consideration. Also, operationally young stands are challenging to treat without excessive residual stand damage at higher BA's. We have experienced this in the EIS. This led to a discussion on conventional harvesting techniques. It was noted that we should document in the decision for the Rush - Brushy Commercial Thinning CE that we are using an Rx that's appropriate to these stands and document the BA and other parameters used to treat the stands.
- (4) Mark - How have other Forests tackled the implementation of these WRAPS? Elrand answered that some have started work through CE's and some others have completed large landscape district-wide project analysis.

- (5) Mark noted there are 5 District Watershed Planning Units (Forest Health Next Step EA Watersheds) in the Rush-Brushy Watershed project area. Mark asked what the entry schedule for those watersheds are on our Watershed EA entry schedule. Elrand noted we were off schedule about 6 years, but wasn't sure exactly which year each of the 5 watersheds in Rush-Brushy were planned for an EA.
- (6) Janice Barrett - Question - Is there an assurance that logging equipment won't cause sediment/ reduce water quality. Discussion on the disturbance associated with thinning and roads. Effects to water quality and aquatic species has been evaluated in the FHRP EIS, Watershed EA's and effects to aquatic species will be evaluated in the Biological Evaluation for this project. Additionally, Elrand advised the participants that the District will conduct a Roads Analysis in 2012. Also, in 2012 the District has additional funding to conduct road maintenance.

Terrance Fletcher, District ORA, provided a presentation on the **Owl Creek Trail Assessment** conducted by a private contractor, which was introduced at the last Panel meeting. The powerpoint presentation is attached.

Dr. Borden commended the good work completed by the contractor for the Trail Assessment, but had concerns that all options were not evaluated. All recommendations in the Assessment focus on improving the current trail system and did not consider expanding the trail system into new areas. He expressed the need to have additional trails to reduce the amount of use that is on the current system and to add additional horse camps in other areas. Also, Dr. Borden recommends the public be involved in the planning process and alternative development.

There was a discussion on the need to address current trail problems (safety hazards and erosion problems) before new trails are considered.

Terrance reminded the panel that nothing is set in stone. The contractor was given parameters to work within that address making the current system safe and sustainable. The trails subcommittee will review and discuss the assessment. The assessment is a document to work from and gives us a potential plan in hand to use for securing additional funds/marketing tool. Jeff Still commented that the FS continually says funds are not available, but there are grants available. He also expressed concern that there will be a plan, but no action. Additionally, Terrance

highlighted that we will limit the amount of new mileage. But in order to get the trail sustainable, we may gain some mileage to get away from creek crossings.

Mark Kolinski agreed with Dr. Borden on not adding more trails to the existing area, take some pressure off of this watershed. Mark also wants the canyons and rare communities to be addressed in any assessment or proposal. Jeff agreed that the trails should not be near the canyons or outcrops.

Randy Feltman expressed concern that the FS can't do anything without getting opposition - thinning and trail work. He also suggested that funding for horse trail work could come from cutting timber. This may be included in a Rush-Brushy Stewardship Project proposal, an exchange of goods for services, for projects identified in the Rush-Brushy Watershed Restoration Action plan.

Starlin Blankenship asked if horse trails would be routed through the proposed timber sales. There are timber sales with horse trails in or adjacent to them. Stewardship #3 is an example where contract provisions mandate which timber units are opened first and listed some dates of high recreation use (spring break and Memorial Day) when operations won't be active. This was presented at the last Liaison Panel meeting.

A member of the public asked for more information on the proposed Horseback Outfitter/Guide permit. Would this allow for things like atv and bicycle rentals? Does this occur on other forests? Will the Forest Service receive revenue from the permit? What is the precedent? Answers from the Ranger - Anyone can apply for a special use permit for such activities. Special use permits have been issued on national forests for hundreds of years. There have been no outfitter/guide permits here. The permittee will have to pay the FS a percentage of their revenue.

Mark Kolinski, Wild South, shared a presentation on the **January 2012 Restoration Monitoring Tour**. His power point is attached.

Liaison Panel Business:

The **next meeting** date was set for Thursday, May 10 in Double Springs.

The minutes from the last meeting were available at this meeting and are available on the Bankhead National Forest website,

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/alabama/districts/bankheadRD>

Mark suggested an effort to revitalize the panel, to purge inactive members and recruit new members from a broader representation of stakeholders and additional agency representation.

Allison reminded the panel that Ron Eakes had retired and at the last meeting we recommended and accepted Jud Easterwood (Ron's replacement - District Supervisor) and Matt Brock (Black Warrior WMA Manager) as representatives for the Ala. Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources. Additionally, Charles Chandler resigned from the Liaison Panel.

It was agreed to review the charter prior to the next panel meeting and contact existing membership to gauge their interest in future presentation.

See attached pdf's for copies of all presentations.