

**BANKHEAD NATIONAL FOREST
LIAISON PANEL MEETING SUMMARY
JUNE 7, 2012
DOUBLE SPRINGS, 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
Shannon Holbrook, US FWS
Chuck Byrd, The Nature Conservancy
Matt Brock, ADCNR - WFF
Jud Easterwood, ADCNR - WFF
John Howell, Forester (forest industry)

Additional Attendees

Randy Campbell
Terry Fry
Russell Miller
Matt Smith
Mike Bagwell
James Alexander
Janice Barrett
Barbara Crow
Jim Crow
Colmore Christian
Stuart McGregor
Joey Stephenson
Ron Hill
Brad Nail
Rory Frasier
Jeff Mobley

Forest Service Attendees

Elrand Denson, District Ranger
Allison Cochran, District Wildlife Biologist
Steve Lohr, Forest Supervisor

Jody Tetlow, Recreation Program Mgr
Kerry Clark, District FMO
Jeremy McDonald, Prescriptionist

Meeting Agenda

6:00	Welcome Liaison Panel Charter/Ground rules	Elrand Denson, District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:05	Updates on Bankhead Project Proposals & Sequoia Forestkeeper Court Decision	Elrand Denson
6:25	Mussels on Bankhead Nat'l Forest & Black Warrior Basin	Stuart McGregor, Biologist, Geological Survey of Ala.
7:00	Trails Update Owl Creek Horse Trail Assessment 2012 Owl Creek Horse Trail Projects	Terrance Fletcher ORA, USFS, Bankhead
7:30	Forest Supervisor's Address	Steve Lohr, Forest Supervisor National Forests in Ala.
8:00	Close-out Next meeting & agenda items Panel business items Membership Review	Elrand Denson District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead

Presentations & Summary of Discussion:

Ranger Denson opened the meeting and introductions of the Liaison Panel members present was made. Denson reviewed the Bankhead Liaison Panel Mission and Ground Rules (see attached documents).

Denson provided updates on the Sequoia Forestkeeper law suit and injunction. Forest Service will now be providing 30 day legal notice & comment period on all projects, including those categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS. Those projects covered by categorical exclusions may now be subject to

appeal. 30 day legal notice and comment period and legal notice of decision will be published in the Northwest Alabamian, Bankhead's paper of record.

Ranger Denson also provided updates on Bankhead projects. See attached documents. Denson reported that all Wilderness trails are open. The public commented that Trail 224 is not open. Denson explained that the Wilderness Trail clearing contract specifications have been met - downed trees from April 2011 tornadoes have been cleared. Additional work by volunteers or AmeriCorps is possible to clear debris and encroaching vegetation that did not result from April 2011 tornadoes.

Allison Cochran, District Wildlife Biologist, provided a review of Liaison Panel membership as the issue of participation was raised at the last meeting. Cochran reviewed the current list of members, those interests/areas that are vacant due to recent resignations, and panel members who have not been active. The Bankhead staff will follow-up with the following to determine interest in future participation - Lawrence and Winston County Commission; Gene Gold, Echota Cherokee of Alabama; Faron Weeks, Bankhead Cultural & Historical Society; Mary Lee Ratliff, Recreation. John Howell, Jasper Lumber Company, joined the Liaison Panel. John represents forest industry and is a professional forester. His alternates include Russell Miller and Brad Nail, foresters with Jasper Lumber Co. JD Snoddy expressed an interest in joining the panel, representing local government. Randy Campbell expressed an interest in joining the panel, representing private land management, in the position vacated by Bill Snoddy. Joey Stephenson was suggested for panel membership, representing recreation and forest landowner within Bankhead. Joey declined membership.

Stuart McGregor, Biologist with Geological Survey of Alabama, provided a presentation on the importance of Bankhead streams to mussels. See attached power-point presentation. Members of the public asked questions and commented on mussels' ability to live in dry streams; work on the Big South Fork with integration of horse trails and mussels; sensitivity of mussels to nutrient swings and other impacts to the aquatic environment. McGregor, answered that mussels hearty and have been known to live without water for great deals of time.

Jody Tetlow, Bankhead Recreation Program Manager, provided an update on the Owl Creek Horse Trail Assessment and 2012 horse trail projects. A subcommittee has met and identified the course of action they would like to see in the Owl Creek

Assessment. Funding was received to put some projects in place in 2012 that are working toward the objectives and needs identified in the Trails Assessment. One project is to install a bridge at the upper Brushy Creek crossing on the Pine Torch loop. This site currently has steps that are eroded and not being used. A bridge will eliminate the steps and horse traffic in the stream. A second project is at the Brushy Creek crossing on the Brushy Creek Road (FS 254). A section of trail will be re-routed where it is currently eroded down to rock and is a safety hazard. The third project is to improve (harden, re-align, and improve) the crossing on Coal Branch locally known as the dinner bell or picnic area. Ranger Denson explained the Forest Service has procured funds to address a few crossings and the priority is to deal with stream crossings, especially in mussel habitat. Water opportunities will still be available.

The public asked questions about what kind of material/technology will be used for the hardened crossing. Ranger Denson answered that the Engineers are looking at that now. There was a question about the cost of the bridge and whether it would be constructed in house or by contract. Denson answered the cost will be from \$40,000 - \$70,000 and the Forest Service Enterprise Team, Trails Unlimited, has been contracted to install the bridge. A similar bridge on Shoal Creek RD of Talladega NF cost +/- \$40,000. The public suggested the Engineers should talk to Mr. Bacletts at Big South Fork because they have done this. The public asked about the length of the bridge. The bridge will span at least 40 feet and will be designed to support the weight requirements of the bridge. The bridge design will also accommodate bikes.

Forest Supervisor Steve Lohr addressed the Liaison Panel and primarily discussed the proposed Oil and Gas leasing on the National Forests in Alabama. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages subsurface mineral rights on Forest Service lands. Oil and gas leasing is one of the many uses of National Forest lands (like timber, wildlife, water, etc). BLM has advertised a lease on 42,000 acres on the Shoal Creek, Oakmulgee and Conecuh. The lease closes June 14.

There has not been a lot of leasing in Alabama in the past. 71,000 acres on NFs in AL will be leased, mostly on Conecuh. There are 3 active wells currently on those 71,000 acres. There is a long history of leasing (since 1969 on Bankhead), but not a lot of drilling has occurred. Forest Service is directed by regulations and federal law on oil and gas leasing with few exceptions, Wilderness being one.

There are 2 levels of environmental evaluation related to oil & gas leasing. One level (coarse filter) is at the Forest Plan Level. That has been done in the Revised Land & Resource Management Plan. Approximately 87% of the National Forests are available for leasing per the Forest Plan. An amendment to the Forest Plan restricts surface occupation on 40% steep slope. In Alabama, that has been the extent of it - companies buy leases and haven't drilled during the 10 year lease period. The second level of environmental evaluation (fine filter) comes when a lease files an application to drill. Then there is a site-specific environmental analysis. The applicant will identify the extent to what they will do and the area. The BLM and FS will evaluate that application.

There is currently an expression of interest from a company on Bankhead National Forest. Forest Service has to evaluate whether we will move forward. BLM has not offered lands from lease on BNF like what is happening on Talladega. On Bankhead we are earlier in the process than Talladega.

There were questions and discussion on "fracking". Lohr answered that per the BLM fracking is generally used to extract methane from shale bed and that is not what we have on Bankhead. A member of the public who works in the oil and gas industry stated that the type of formation from shale gas is down there but it is pretty thin and wouldn't be very economical. He explained that 3 agencies would be involved, FS, BLM, and the state of Alabama Oil and Gas Board. He went on to discuss the opportunities for public involvement and that we should invite the Ala. Oil & Gas Board to address the Liaison Panel on permitting, environmental issues, etc. The public asked Lohr if the Ala. Oil & Gas Board has any jurisdiction to have real input on Forest Service and Lohr answered no. Some discussion on current acreage under lease on Oakmulgee ensued; Continued discussion on development and environmental analysis. Lohr explained that we offer the minerals to be developed and can do mitigations through environmental analysis; More discussion on fracking and Talladega situation. Lohr stated there is no indication of intention to use fracking on Talladega. If it is proposed, Forest Service will evaluate it as such. The purpose of this discussion was to inform the public on minerals issues. All questions should be directed to the Forest Supervisor's office.

Liaison Panel Business:

The **next meeting** date was set for Thursday, August 23 in Moulton. Suggested agenda items include Restoration Update (EA and EIS progress); Restoration Monitoring Team Report; Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. There was a very brief

discussion on hemlock wooly adelgid, an insect pest that is impacting hemlock trees throughout the east. There was a question on white-nose syndrome in bats and status of cave closure on Bankhead. Cochran provided a quick update that WNS was found in Alabama this year and also in gray bats. All caves on National Forests remain closed to slow the spread of this wildlife epidemic. Compliance with cave closure appears to be good overall.

The minutes from the last meeting are available on the Bankhead National Forest website, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/alabama/districts/bankheadRD>

See attached documents for copies of all presentations.