



Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

Telogia Analysis Area U.S. Forest Service Compartments 01, 02, and 09 Apalachicola Ranger District APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST Liberty County, Florida

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Telogia Environmental Assessment (EA) and supporting documents, I have decided to implement Alternative B with the following modifications:

Table 1. List of changes to original proposed action

Stand	Original proposal	Modified Decision
Compartment 9 stand 15	Clearcut stagnated slash pine plantation with longleaf reserved, grid hexazinone and foliar triclopyr to control turkey oaks, plant longleaf pine and wiregrass.	No clearcut. 1yr firewood harvest to remove oaks, herbicide to control small oaks and resprouts, plant longleaf and wiregrass where needed, authorize chainsaw removal of slash pines <4.6in dbh in the future if longleaf pines have high mortality or low height growth.
Compartment 9 stand 18	Modified group selection cut for uneven aged management and thinning to 50 ft ² /ac of pine basal area throughout the rest of the stand.	Stand is no longer in the proposed action.
Compartment 1 stands 5, 8, and 11	Clearcut stagnated slash pine plantation with longleaf reserved, grid hexazinone and foliar triclopyr to control turkey oaks, plant longleaf pine and wiregrass.	Clearcut stagnated slash pine plantation but reserve slash pine ≥10in. dbh with a crown ratio of at least 30%, grid hexazinone and foliar triclopyr to control turkey oaks, plant longleaf pine and wiregrass.
Compartment 1 stand 36 and Compartment 2 stand 26	Third row thin (harvest every third row).	Thin from below to 50 BA. This will leave more >10in. dbh trees and will result in no harvest of >14in. dbh trees.

These modifications are further discussed on p. 5-6 below. I have concluded that these changes will not result in any effects that were not already considered in the EA and therefore, do not constitute new information that requires additional analysis or public involvement.

The complete treatment actions are as follows:

- First or intermediate thinning of approximately 1528 acres of slash and longleaf pine stands. These stands will be thinned to 50 BA to reduce competition, open the forest canopy, promote the establishment of herbaceous groundcover species, and increase radial growth and tree vigor.
- Conversion of 103 acres (Compartment 1 stands 5, 8, and 11) of stagnant off-site slash pine plantations to longleaf pine. Stands will be clearcut and planted with longleaf pine seedlings. All longleaf pine will be reserved during clearcut operations. Slash pine >10" dbh with a crown to stem ratio of 30% or greater will also be reserved.
 - Apply the herbicide hexazinone for site preparation on approximately 103 acres (Compartment 1 stands 5, 8, and 11). Foliar application of triclopyr would be used for pine release on 64 acres (Compartment 1 stands 8 and 11).
 - Clearcut is the optimal method to restore longleaf on these sites. Regeneration methods such as shelterwood or seed tree cuts are not feasible due to a lack of adequate longleaf trees to use as a seed source.
- Restore native groundcover by hand planting or seeding wiregrass on 149 acres. (Compartment 1 stands 5, 8, and 11 and Compartment 9 stand 15)
- Conduct hardwood reduction treatments in Compartment 1 stand 7 (31 acres) and Compartment 9 stand 15 (46 acres). The herbicide hexazinone will be applied on a 6'X6' spot grid at a rate of 3 quarts per acre in Compartment 1 stand 7. Compartment 9 stand 15 will be opened for firewood harvest and afterwards treated with hexazinone and a foliar application of triclopyr.
- Release longleaf pine seedlings by removing slash pine <4.6" dbh in Compartment 9 stand 15. Pine trees will be girdled or cut down by chainsaw.

Connected actions necessary to facilitate the above activities include maintenance of 0.81 miles of landlines, reconstruction of approximately 13.68 miles of system roads, temporary improvement and use of approximately 0.62 miles of non-system which provide access to pine plantations, and the maintenance of approximately 8.11 miles of system roads used to haul timber products from the analysis area.

These actions will take place in Compartments 1, 2, and 9 of the Apalachicola Ranger District, Apalachicola National Forest in Liberty County, Florida within the next 3-5 years.

COORDINATION MEASURES

Coordination measures were incorporated into the design of the project to reduce the risk of potential impacts to the physical, biological, and social-economic environments. These measures include all applicable Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines (USDA, 1999, p. 3.1-3.32), particularly those described below.

Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive (PETS) Species

- If modifications are made in the project, or if additional information regarding the effects of the project on listed species becomes available, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) would be notified and informal consultation would be reinitiated if the USFWS or the FS determines it is needed.
- There are isolated wetlands in the project area. Because no listed or sensitive species are known to occur or are likely to occur in these ponds, harvest would be allowed up to the pond edge but only when it is dry enough to allow for equipment use without causing soil disturbance.
- Contracts would contain penalty clauses to protect white-banded Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) trees.
- If possible, temporary roads, log decks, and skid trails would be located outside of active or inactive RCW clusters (except for skidding timber out of clusters).
- Log decks should be located no closer than 200 ft. from RCW cavity trees.
- Timber and road contracts will prohibit harvest, hauling, and/or roadwork within active RCW clusters during the nesting season, April 1 through July 31. Exceptions will be made for hauling and/or roadwork on major numbered roads and highways (FS Level 5, 4, 3 Roads). Exceptions will also be made during nesting season if a biologist determines through direct observation that the cluster is no longer active, there is not a pair, or the young have fledged before July 31.
- **WL-11**—Educate field personnel and contractors in burrow identification. In potential gopher tortoise habitat, prohibit locating log landings, designated skid trails, and parking equipment within 25 feet of known gopher tortoise burrows. Equipment operators will be instructed to maintain a 25 foot distance during operations when previously unknown burrows are encountered (USDA 1999b).
- Purchasers and contractors will be advised of the possible presence of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and will be instructed to avoid harming any wildlife they encounter, including snakes.
- Equipment cleaning measures would be required by contracts to prevent the introduction of non-native invasive plants.
- To protect aquatic species; pesticide application, timber harvesting activities, and road maintenance will adhere to the standards of Florida's Silvicultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). For a detailed discussion of these practices, see the Silviculture BMP Manual: http://freshfromflorida.s3.amazonaws.com/silvicultural_bmp_manual.pdf

Heritage Resources

- **HE-1** If any cultural resources are discovered during operations all ground-disturbing activity will cease. The Forest Archeologist will determine changes to be made to the project before work resumes (USDA 1999b).
- **HE-9** Known cultural resource sites will be protected by timber sale contract and no ground-disturbing activities will occur in these areas, which may include segments of roads (USDA 1999b).

Public Health and Safety

- Use herbicides in accordance with registration label. Place herbicide notice signs at treatment sites. Herbicide notice signs (FSH 7109.11) would be clearly posted, and would include the application date, the herbicide used, and safe reentry date. Private lands would not be treated. No herbicide would be applied within 100 feet of private land. No herbicide would be applied within 100 feet of any public or domestic water source.
- The Pesticide Use Handbook (FSH 2109.14) and the Health and Safety Code Handbook (FSH 6709.11) would be used as guidance for workers. Workers who apply herbicides would be trained to ensure minimum impacts and maximum effectiveness. Only those methods that assure proper application of herbicides would be used. Herbicide application by contract and/or in-house personnel would be performed by or directly supervised by the holder of a current Federal Pesticide Applicator's license following all current legal application procedures administered by the USDA Forest Service and the label on the herbicide container.

Soil & Water

- **WA-1** Adhere to standards of Florida's Silvicultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). For a detailed discussion of these practices, see the Silviculture BMP Manual: http://freshfromflorida.s3.amazonaws.com/silvicultural_bmp_manual.pdf
- **WA-2** Four perennial streams are located within the analysis area (Millpoint Branch, Yellow Creek, and Western Branch) and drain into Telogia Creek. A 35-foot Special/Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) will be required in the following areas (LRMP, 3-24): Compartment 1 Stands 5, 11, 22, 23, and 36; Compartment 2 stands 5, 6, 10, 21, 23, 25, 31, 33, 35, and Compartment 9 Stands 8, 9, 20 and 21. No operation of heavy equipment will occur during periods when weather and soil conditions will promote excessive rutting or compaction.
- Forest Plan standard WA-6: Restrict soil compacting activities, including logging traffic when the water table is within 12 inches of the surface, or when soil moisture exceeds the plastic limits (USDA 1999b).

Vegetation

- **VG-37** - Control invasive terrestrial and aquatic weeds. Do not apply herbicides within 60 feet of any PETS plant species unless analysis indicate herbicide use is the best way to protect PETS plants from invasive weeds (USDA 1999b). Contract specifications for

equipment cleaning will be placed in contracts to prevent the introduction of exotic plants.

- **VG-18** – Minimize soil-disturbing site preparation in longleaf and slash pine sites. When disturbance is necessary to achieve the desired future conditions, use methods that displace no more than 10 percent of the soil surface in the treated area. The objective should be to maintain the integrity of the native herbaceous vegetation (especially wiregrass) overtime (USDA 1999b).
- Follow guidelines for planning and applying herbicides.

Visual Quality

- **VG-15** - To enhance visual quality, require that slash, tops, and logging debris be piled no more than 2 feet high within 100 feet of levels A and B roads and designated trails. There are no stands within the analysis area that require visual mitigation.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Apalachicola National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in July 2013 and updated periodically during the planning process. The public was invited to review and comment on the proposal through scoping notification, legal notices and the posting of a draft EA on the National Forests' in Florida web page for the 30-day notice and comment period. Several responses were received and addressed by the Forest Service staff. On March 3, 2014, pursuant 36 CFR 218 subparts A and B, the Forest Service published the EA and draft decision notice (DN) for the 45 day objection period. Two objections to the project were received that met all content and requirements outlined in 36 CFR §218.8. The modifications to the proposed action in Table 1 are the result of dialogue between the objectors and the Forest Service. The objection reviewing official, Susan Jeheber-Matthews, Forest Supervisor for the National Forests in Florida, provided a written resolution of the objections on August 4, 2014.

DECISION RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this proposal is to improve and/or maintain a healthy forest ecosystem by: thinning both longleaf and slash pine plantations to allow for an increase in radial growth and live crown ratio; removing offsite or stunted slash pine and restoring with indigenous longleaf pine seedlings; and reducing and controlling overabundant hardwood trees and brush to restore native herbaceous groundcover. Secondary benefits include improved current and future habitat for PETS species, such as the indigo snake and the RCW through vegetation management. There is a need to reduce current stocking levels of stands within the project area to open the forest canopy and promote herbaceous groundcover growth and establishment. In addition a need exists to reintroduce native longleaf pine to site appropriate areas.

Thinning overstocked stands of longleaf and slash pine stands will open the forest floor to sunlight and promote herbaceous groundcover establishment and growth. These stands will become healthier and more productive while trending towards future habitat for the RCW. The

thinning of young overstocked pine plantations is a standard practice utilized in forest management to maintain stand health and vigor. The proposed action for the Telogia project included clearcuts with reserves in four stands (totaling 149ac.) that are currently stunted slash pine plantations. The original proposal in stands 1/5, 1/8, 1/11 and 9/15 was to cut all slash pine (but retain any existing longleaf), prepare the site with herbicide to control competition from turkey oaks, and then plant longleaf pine seedlings and wiregrass. This sequence of management activities has been successful for establishing longleaf pine on other degraded sandhill sites and is acceptable under both the Forest Plan and the RCW Recovery Plan. The RCW foraging habitat analysis in the Telogia project BA did not show that these activities were likely to adversely affect RCW according to the analysis guidelines. However, after considering concerns brought forward by the public during the administrative review process I have determined that the modifications described in the Table 1 (no harvest of slash pines in 9/15 and reserving slash pines >10in. dbh in stands 1/5, 1/8 and 1/11) are consistent with the Telogia project's goals of long-term restoration of these stands to longleaf pine while also providing some additional short-term RCW habitat.

Supplementing groundcover grasses by planting wiregrass plugs will hasten the recovery of the groundcover and also help fire spread across the landscape. Harvesting and site preparation methods proposed to shape the future conditions of these stands have been utilized successfully in the past by the Forest Service and many other land management practitioners. Hardwood control treatments are needed on an additional 77 acres to prevent further understory and midstory encroachment by woody species.

I selected alternative B (with modifications) because the no-action alternative (A) would not accomplish the goals and objectives established in the forest plan and would not meet the purpose and need for action. Pine stands would continue to exhibit diminished growth and groundcover conditions would deteriorate due to canopy closure. Off-site plantations would continue to trend towards stagnation and reach the point where they would not respond to any silvicultural treatments. I selected alternative B (with modifications) over the no herbicide alternative (C) because the herbicides hexazinone and triclopyr have been used frequently with great success in similar conditions across this forest. These herbicides work well to control competing vegetation which is the key to restoring longleaf pine to these sites. Mitigation steps will be taken to limit adverse impacts on water, air, and soil quality. Herbicides will not be applied in times of high moisture, wind, and temperatures. Mechanical site preparation would expose the landscape to more potential for soil compaction and erosion whereas chemical application of herbicide would be far less impactful in regards to soil compaction.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

CONTEXT

The Telogia Analysis area is in the northern portion of the Apalachicola Ranger District. All compartments have common borders with private land and are situated just south of the Hosford, Florida. The forest has several user groups that pursue dispersed recreation opportunities within this area. There are several environmental groups that look to the forest as having pristine model longleaf pine ecosystems. There are also research organizations that utilize the National Forest for their studies. These groups operate over the whole forest but may or may not be present where the proposed actions would take place. All of the proposed actions would take place within the next 3 to 5 years.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.** Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because the proposed actions will utilize known design standards or be applied according to the product labels. (See EA page 51-53)
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the impacts of the proposed treatments would be limited to the land within the analysis area. It is unlikely that any effects would be broad enough to affect the landscape. (See EA page 23-27 and 53-54)
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. All of the proposed actions have been done before in similar ground conditions with satisfactory results. (See EA page 20-62)
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. (See EA page 20-62)
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because all of the proposed actions have been utilized several times before.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. The effect

of the proposed actions are limited to the local area and there are no other effects that would be additive to the effects of the proposed action. Prescribed burning serves as the future activity identified in most resource area analysis. (See EA page 20-62)

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed , or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because all the stands and roads to be treated by a proposed action have been surveyed by our Forest Archeologist (See EA page 53-54). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because any site discovered will be flagged to be avoided during the proposed operations. In addition all contracts required to carry out the proposed work would have Archeological protection clauses which would stop the work immediately if a new site is discovered. (See EA page 15)
9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. The Biological Assessment determined that implementation of the project is not likely to adversely affect RCW, indigo snake or frosted flatwoods salamander and would have no effect on other listed species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with that determination on July 7, 2014. (See BA and EA page 28-39)
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the 1999 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (See EA page 5).

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The decision to implement Alternative B (with modifications), it is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's forestwide goals and objectives listed on pages 2-3 to 2-7. The project was designed in conformance with the Forest Plan's standards and guidelines for vegetation management, wildlife habitat improvement, heritage resources protection, wildland fire prevention, and road management.

Pursuant to Sect. 7 policies for interagency consultation under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, a Biological Assessment was prepared and received US Fish and Wildlife Service concurrence on 07/07/2014.

Pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act and other federal laws protecting cultural resources, a cultural resource survey was completed and concurrence was received by the State Historic Preservation Office before the end of the objection filing period.

Clearcutting and planting longleaf pine seedlings has been determined to be the optimum method for regeneration of stands 5, 8, and 11 of Compartment 1. Seed tree or shelterwood cuts would not adequately restock the stands with longleaf due to the lack of mature residual longleaf trees to serve as a seed source. The stands to be clearcut are slash pine stands that are off-site.

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) states that the Forest Service "shall insure that, prior to harvest, stands of trees throughout the National Forest System shall generally have reached the culmination of mean annual increment of growth (CMAI) (calculated on the basis of cubic measurement or other methods of calculation at the discretion of the Secretary)" (NFMA 1976). The clearcuts proposed under the Telogia Analysis Area are exempt from conforming to CMAI standards based on the forestwide goals outlined in the Forest Plan to "Maintain or, where necessary restore ecosystem composition, structure, and function within the natural range of variability in all ecosystems, with emphasis on longleaf pine-wiregrass...."(USDA 1999b pg. 2-3). To accomplish the goals outlined, the Forest Plan has set a long term objective to "restore all off-site slash pine to appropriate native vegetation" (USDA 1999b pg. 2-5).

Based on the above Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA, I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

CONCLUSION OF ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

This decision meets the requirements for 36 CFR 218 subparts A and B. This decision is not subject to further administrative review by the Forest Service or the Department of Agriculture (36 CFR 218.11(b)(2)).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of this decision will occur immediately.

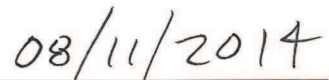
CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Branden Tolver: btolver02@.fs.fed.us or by phone (850) 926-3561 extension 6525.



MARCUS A. BEARD

District Ranger



Date



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References

National Forest Management Act.

USDA. 1999a. Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida.

USDA. 1999b. Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for National Forests in Florida.

Appendix A

Proposed Action, Alternative B – Estimated Treatment Acres by Stand

Comp	Stand	Treatment Acres	Treatment	Hexazinone (Site Prep)	Hexazinone (Hardwood Control)	Plant Wiregrass Plugs	Plant Longleaf	Foliar Triclopyr (Release)
1	4	74	Thin					
1	5	39	Clearcut (Reserve all longleaf pine, reserve all slash pine >10" dbh with crown ratio of at least 30% ratio)	39		39	39	
1	6	20	Thin					
1	7	31	Hardwood Control		31			
1	8	22	Clearcut (Reserve all longleaf pine, reserve all slash pine >10" dbh with crown ratio of at least 30% ratio)	22		22	22	22
1	11	42	Clearcut (Reserve all longleaf pine, reserve all slash pine >10" dbh with crown ratio of at least 30% ratio)	42		42	42	42
1	12	69	Thin					
1	22	13	Thin					
1	36	16	Thin (reserve all trees >10" dbh)					
2	5	27	Thin					
2	6	18	Thin					
2	10	38	Thin					
2	13	62	Thin					
2	21	40	Thin					
2	23	54	Thin					
2	25	61	Thin					
2	26	63	Thin (reserve all trees >10" dbh)					
2	27	62	Thin					
2	28	21	Thin					
2	31	59	Thin					
2	33	61	Thin					
2	34	48	Thin					
2	35	43	Thin					
2	38	13	Thin					
2	40	17	Thin					
2	41	7	Thin					
2	47	11	Thin					
9	5	59	Thin					
9	8	94	Thin					
9	9	127	Thin					
9	10	8	Thin					
9	13	17	Thin					
9	14	55	Thin					

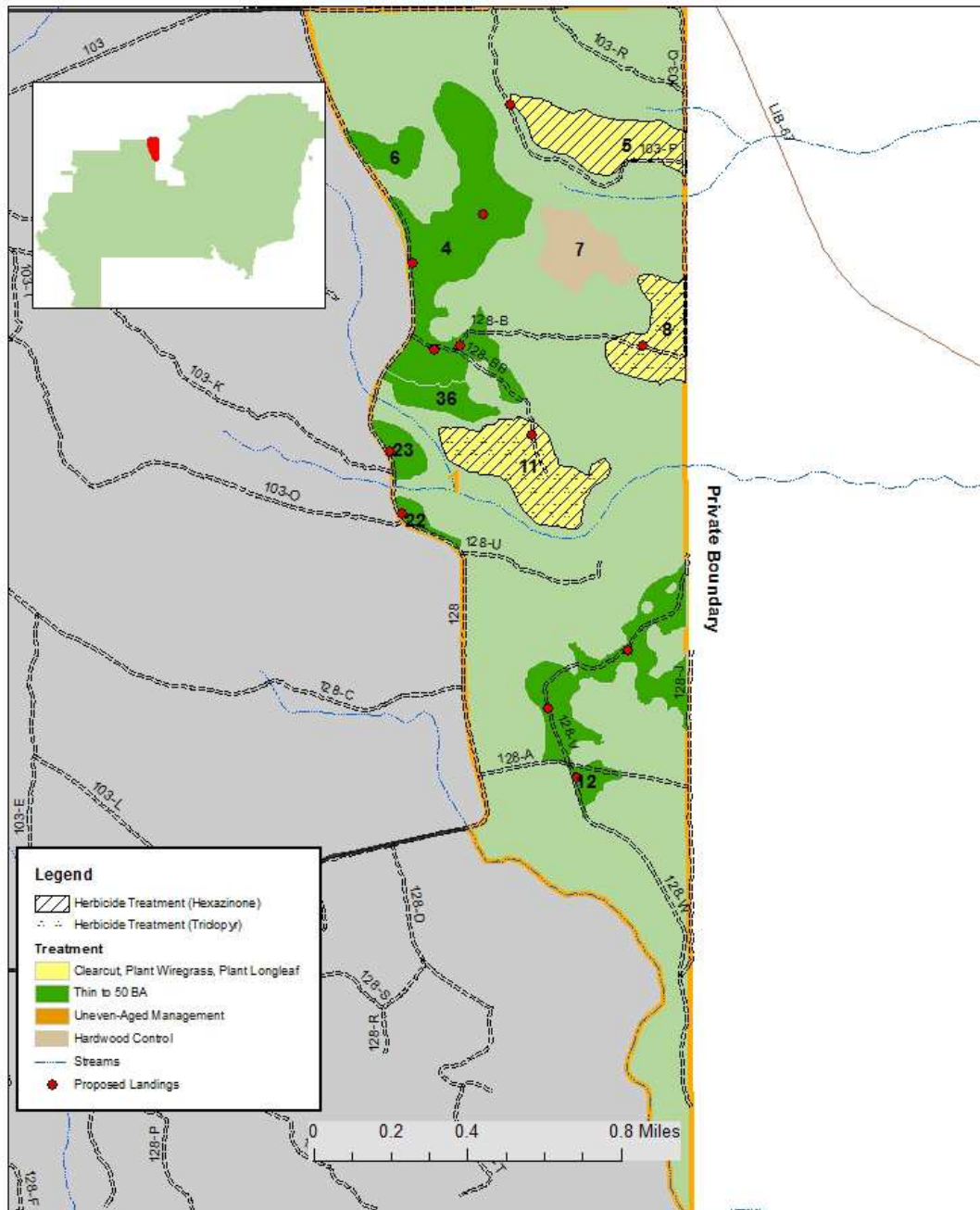


Comp	Stand	Treatment Acres	Treatment	Hexazinone (Site Prep)	Hexazinone (Hardwood Control)	Plant Wiregrass Plugs	Plant Longleaf	Foliar Triclopyr (Release)
9	15	46	Hardwood reduction & chainsaw removal of slash pine <4.6 dbh where needed		46	46	46	46
9	16	71	Thin					
9	20	130	Thin					
9	21	24	Thin					
9	23	3.4	Thin					
9	302	3.8	Thin					
9	303	16.8	Thin					
9	304	28	Thin					
9	305	5.6	Thin					
9	306	4.8	Thin					
Totals		1724.4		103	77	149	149	110



Apalachicola National Forest

Compartment 0001





Apalachicola National Forest

Compartment 0002

