

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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April 8, 2014

STATE OF ALABAMA

Mr. Thomas L. Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

Dear Chief Tidwell,

Section 8204 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 amended the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 by adding Section 602, which allows the Governor of the State to request the designation of insect and disease treatment areas by the Secretary of Agriculture. This delegation was then given to the Chief of the United States Forest Service by the Secretary. I am writing to request that the Bankhead National Forest, an area where there is a high probability of a Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) outbreak this year, be designated as a landscape scale insect and disease treatment area. I also request that the National Forests in Alabama, in particular, all divisions of the Talladega National Forest, be designated as a landscape scale insect and disease area with potential for Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) outbreak. I am making this request, according to the recent legislation, in writing, and no later than April 8, 2014.

Alabama is at the southwestern end of the range of eastern hemlock. Eastern hemlock (*Tsuga Canadensis*) is long-lived, living upwards to 800 years and is the most shade tolerant tree species of eastern forests. Hemlock provides habitat for a number of avian and aquatic species, providing critical thermal cover. The HWA, a non-native insect pest originally from Asia, was first reported in eastern Virginia in the early 1950's. Since then it has spread through much of the Appalachian region of the United States, occurring in 16 states from Maine to Georgia. In January 2012, the HWA (*Adelges tsugae*, Annand) was reported in Franklin County Tennessee, about 60 miles from the Bankhead National Forest. The adelgid feeds on all stages of eastern hemlock. The entire range of eastern hemlock is at risk.

The USDA Forest Service, Bankhead Ranger District completed an environmental analysis in 2013 to allow treatment of hemlock trees infected with HWA with both chemical and biological methods to reduce tree mortality in hemlock communities. Treatments will maintain recreational settings and reduce the amount of standing dead and down woody material. The HWA lacks natural enemies and rapidly spreads to infect

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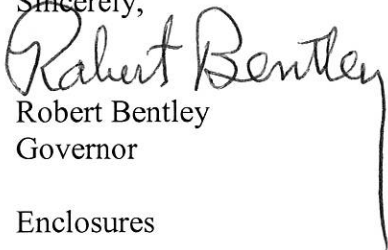
a population of hemlock. Without intervention, 100% of the hemlock component on the Bankhead will likely be lost to the adelgid.

According to the 2013 spring southern pine beetle (SPB) pheromone survey, Alabama entered its 8th consecutive year of low SPB population. However, on the Bankhead, Oakmulgee, and Shoal Creek Ranger Districts, the number of southern pine beetles caught was quite high, and a relative increase from previous years. This increase was so significant that the potential SPB infestation from these specific areas in Alabama may reach moderate levels. These Forest units are in close proximity to counties in Alabama with higher infestation risk levels.

From 1999 to 2003, Alabama's forests suffered a severe Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) outbreak, impacting over 203 thousand acres with an estimated economic loss of \$250 million. The results were devastating not only to the Southern Pine ecosystem on Forest Service lands, but also to the timber market and the entire state of Alabama. Local communities were impacted as hundreds of thousands of acres were affected on private, and National Forest lands. Acres lost to the previous SPB outbreak were subsequently replanted with southern pine and these lands are now approaching 20 years of age. This age group of pine stands is at extremely high risk for another SPB outbreak. It is critical that risk reduction work for SPB through thinning continues. National Forests in Alabama have used Forest Health funds to proactively treat over 7,800 acres of southern pines to reduce susceptibility to beetles. Implementation of both the HWA and SPB suppression plans are consistent with the Alabama Forestry Commission's 2010 Forest Assessment and Resource Strategy and the current National Forests in Alabama Land and Resource Management Plan.

We look forward to continuing our great relationship with the National Forests in Alabama and Forest Supervisor Steven Lohr, to monitor for the arrival of the adelgid and evaluate SPB potential, implement SPB risk reduction projects, and protect our vital timber resources here in Alabama. This support of treatment areas will go a long way in furthering our efforts. On behalf of the citizens of Alabama, thank you for your consideration as we work to protect our National Forest lands for all people to enjoy.

Sincerely,


Robert Bentley
Governor

Enclosures