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April 2006

**DECISION NOTICE  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
FOR THE  
BREEZY HILL TRAIL PROJECT  
  
KISATCHIE NATIONAL FOREST  
CATAHOULA RANGER DISTRICT  
GRANT AND RAPIDES PARISHES, LOUISIANA**

United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service Southern Region



Catahoula Ranger District  
Kisatchie National Forest

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### **United States Department of Agriculture – Forest Service, Southern Region**

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**DECISION NOTICE**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
**For the**  
**Breezy Hill Trail Project**



**USDA Forest Service**  
**Catahoula Ranger District – Kisatchie National Forest**  
**Grant and Rapides Parishes, Louisiana**

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An interdisciplinary team (IDT) prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), which considered four alternatives that were developed to address the purpose of and need for action, issues, and no-action alternative requirements. The EA documenting the site-specific environmental analysis for the Breezy Hill Trail Project on the Catahoula Ranger District is available for public review at the District Ranger's office in Bentley, Louisiana.

The initial proposal for this trail was developed in anticipation of a foreseeable closure of the Forest to cross-country travel. By designating trails and routes before a proposed Forest-wide cross-county travel closure, ORV users would not be inconvenienced as designated trails and routes would be in place.

**Decision:**

Based on comments from public scoping, input received during the 30-day public comment period, and the analysis documented in the EA, it is my decision to implement **Modified-Alternative 4** including the associated mitigation measures as depicted in Chapter 1, Section 1.5 (pages 19 through 30) of the Final EA. Also, in response to concerns raised by the US Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service, the following mitigation shall be implemented in order to ensure adequate protection of RCW and their habitat near the designated trail areas:

- 1) Installation of information signs at the trail heads that would alert riders to the presence of RCW clusters and inform them that they must not create trails through those clusters;
- 2) Cluster boundaries will be marked; and
- 3) Cluster sites that have the potential to be traversed by trail riders will be monitored during the nesting season. If user-created trails are observed within the clusters during that time frame, the KNF will issue emergency closure of an area of sufficient size to protect the cluster site.

In summary, this decision authorizes the following:

Designate approximately 66 miles of single-track, multi-directional (two-way travel) motorized trail in response to user demand and the adverse environmental impacts of unmanaged recreational activities with ORVs on the District (see attached map). Implementation of this alternative would include the allocation of land needed to construct three trailheads, five trail loops and four trail connectors. This decision will also amend (Plan Amendment #6) the Forest Plan's current allocation of the Breezy Hill Trail corridor from its existing non-designated trail use to motorized use and allocate the areas designated as trailheads to recreational use. Trailhead facilities' construction would occur at a later date, once facility needs and design are determined, and the environmental effects evaluated in a separate analysis and decision.

Implementation of this decision would not include the construction of the Fish Creek Connector (Connector 2) in order to avoid impacts to sensitive riparian resources and potential archeological resources (Chapter 2, Section 2.2.4). Under this modification of Alternative 4, the proposed trail would be opened seasonally from sunrise to sunset from April 1st through December 31st to motorcycles and bicycles, and year-round to hikers. The proposed trail would be closed to ATV's and horse travel at all times. However, the proposed trail and cross-country travel would be closed by Supervisor's Order whenever conditions (soil saturation) warrant.

In addition, this decision would include temporary closures of logical and minimal areas to cross-country travel to promote trail construction and obliteration or rehabilitation of user-created trails in the areas of construction/maintenance (i.e. trail loops). This would occur in phases and the closed areas would be signed

accordingly, thereby making the temporary closures enforceable. These temporary closures would last up to one year or more.

In those locations where the user-created trails and the newly designated trail intersect, District personnel would close off the user-created trail by cutting and leaving undesirable trees to block the trail, or possibly piling brush within the trail clearing. District personnel may also disk, seed, and fertilize to reduce the footprint of trail activity in anticipation of re-vegetating these areas, so that these old trails can heal. The District may also put up signs discouraging travel off the designated trail, and may place or erect fences to keep riders on the designated trail. Closure of large areas requiring rehabilitation would be signed until they can be considered restored.

Finally, approximately 76 stream crossings (as determined by project analysis) throughout the proposed trail would be protected by the use of hardened surfaces, bridges, or crushed stone to reduce impacts to stream crossings. Signs would be placed at approximately 11 major road crossings to enhance public safety. Trailheads and trail intersections would be signed with mileages of each trail loop from both directions.

Implementation of the actions in this decision will be prioritized by the District Ranger based on funding, available workforce, and land capabilities.

### **Modifications Made to the Original Alternative 4:**

- a) Under this modification of Alternative 4, the proposed trail will be opened seasonally from sunrise to sunset from April 1st through December 31st to motorcycles and bicycles, and year-round to hikers. Originally, Alternative 4 had the trail open seasonally from March 16 through November 14. This modification was made in order to address concerns from trail users who wished to ride during the cooler part of the year. The effects of this change in seasonal closure dates are expected to be similar to those already analyzed in Chapter 3 of the EA for Alternative 4.
- b) In response to concerns raised by the USDI FWS, additional mitigation (listed above) has been added in order to ensure adequate protection of RCW and their habitat near the designated trail areas. These changes involve administrative responsibilities that are consistent with guidance and monitoring needs established in the Forest Plan. They are expected to have little or no environmental effects on their own and should not directly impact trail users unless monitoring shows unacceptable effects to RCW are occurring from off-trail use.

### **Reasons for the Decision:**

1. When compared to the other alternatives, Modified-Alternative 4 will meet the purpose and need for this project, including the project goals (EA Table 2) and project objectives (EA Chapter 1, Section 1.5).
2. Modified-Alternative 4 best ensures off road vehicle (ORV) use on the Catahoula Ranger District will be compatible with the environment, public safety, and other forest users by encouraging designated routes, seasonal trail system closure, temporary trail loop closure during construction and maintenance activities, and improving facilities.
3. Due to the elimination of the Fish Creek Connector (Connector 2), potential environmental consequences will be reduced because the miles of trails in riparian areas and the number of stream crossings are less (EA Table 5).
4. Issues were used to analyze and compare alternatives (EA Chapter 1, Section 1.7) and to drive alternatives (EA Chapter 2, Section 2.2). Modified-Alternative 4 is responsive to the issues of this EA, namely: safety, resource damage, user conflicts and recreation opportunities.
5. Environmental documents used in making this decision include the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision, and the Forest Plan, as amended, as well as the EA and related documents for this project.
6. Modifications to Alternative 4 are responsive to public concerns raised during the scoping and comment periods, as well as internal administrative concerns. The modifications will allow users to ride the trails during the cooler season (still contingent upon suitable ground conditions), but still allow an “off-season” to perform

trail maintenance work and allow minor off-trail disturbances to re-establish native ground cover. Also, monitoring of this year's closure orders show that the trails on the District have remained closed over 50% of the time during the months of January, February, and March.

7. The use of signing and monitoring near RCW clusters under the modified Alternative 4 will help to ensure that the effects to RCW have been accurately assessed and that timely corrective actions can be taken if necessary for as long as the off-trail areas remain open to public use.

### **Other Alternatives Considered:**

*Alternative 1 (No-Action):* The proposed management actions would not be implemented. Riding on user-created trails and cross-country travel would be permitted, further perpetuating resource damage, safety issues, user-conflicts, and soil erosion. The majority of the user-created trails do not meet the Forest Plan desired conditions. This alternative does not conform to the national direction from the Chief of the Forest Service, which encourages the use of designated routes and trails, rather than permitting motorized cross-country travel. No additional measures other than current regulations would be taken to protect resources. This alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and serves as the benchmark for other alternatives in order to show changes or effect on the environment. Alternative 1 does not meet the desired future conditions in the Forest Plan.

*Alternative 2 (Proposed Action):* This alternative is similar to Alternative 4 with the exception that approximately 72 miles of single-track, multi-directional (two-way travel) motorized trail would be designated. In addition, this proposal would include the allocation of land needed to construct three trailheads, five trail loops and five trail connectors.

The proposed trail would be open to cross-country travel, although discouraged by methods previously discussed. However, the proposed trail and cross-country travel would be closed by Supervisor's Order whenever conditions (soil saturation) warrant.

Finally, approximately 92 stream crossings (as determined by project analysis) throughout the proposed trail would be protected by the use of hardened surfaces, bridges, or crushed stone to reduce impacts to stream crossings. Signs would be placed at approximately 13 major road crossings to enhance public safety. Trailheads and trail intersections would be signed with mileages of each trail loop from both directions.

Alternative 2 was originally scoped as the proposed action; however, results of the environmental analysis found that this alternative would provide less protection than Alternative 4 for several resources (EA, Section 3.2.2.4, Section 3.3.1.2, Section 3.3.4.2.4, Section 3.4.2.4, Section 3.5.2.4, and Section 3.9.2.1).

*Alternative 3:* This alternative is similar to Alternative 2 with the exception that the proposed trail would be open year-round. However, the proposed trail and cross-country travel would be closed by Supervisor's Order whenever conditions (soil saturation) warrant. The results of environmental analysis found that that this alternative may not allow adequate time for trail maintenance needs (EA, Section 3.8.2.4) and could cause unacceptable impacts to soil and vegetation during the time of year when the ground is most likely to become saturated (EA, Section 3.4.2.3 and Section 3.2.2.3).

### **Public Involvement:**

The IDT used legal notices, mailings, internal contacts, and contact with other agencies (SHPO, USDI FWS) to solicit comment and participation in the analysis. The 30-day public scoping period was published in the *Alexandria Town Talk* on April 15, 2005. A letter of invitation to comment on the Proposed Action was mailed to known interested parties and other government agencies. Nine public responses were received during the public scoping period (EA Appendix A).

A notice of completion of the Draft EA and subsequent 30-day public comment period was published in the *Alexandria Town Talk* on December 5, 2005. Several individuals, groups, and agencies (EA Chapter 4) were

notified and provided copies of the Draft EA. One hundred thirty-two public responses (mostly form letters from motorcycle enthusiasts) were received during the 30-day public comment period. (EA Appendix A). Comments were considered both individually and collectively. Consideration of public comment is not intended to be a vote-counting process in which the outcome is determined by the majority opinion; however, relative depth of feeling and interest among the public served to provide a general context for decision-making

### **Finding of No Significant Impact:**

I have determined, through environmental analysis, that these actions are not a major federal action, individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. I have based this determination on the analysis documented in the EA, in light of the following factors listed in 40 CFR 1508.27. Both context and intensity were considered.

#### **Context:**

The operations under this decision apply to a project of limited scope and duration. The potential effects are confined to certain components of the areas to be designated as a single-track, motorized trail. These actions would amend the Forest Plan's current allocation of the Breezy Hill Trail from hiking, biking, and horse travel recreational opportunities to hiking, biking, and motorized use (motorcycle).

#### **Intensity:**

1. I have considered both beneficial and adverse effects in this action, and this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Adherence to specific parameters, standards, guidelines, training, experience, and mitigation measures diminished potential adverse effects. Beneficial effects far outweigh any potential adverse effects. Beneficial effects, however, have not been used to offset or compensate for potential adverse effects (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because Alternative 4 is the most responsive to safety concerns in terms of least amount of hazard exposure to District personnel and volunteer groups constructing/maintaining the proposed trail loops and associated facilities. (EA Chapter 3, Section 3.10) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(2)).
3. The unique characteristics of the geographic area, including historical or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas will not be affected because encouraging motorized vehicles to use designated routes and proper trail management will avoid impacts ((EA Chapter 3)(b)(3)).
4. Based on public involvement, the effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(4)).
5. There are no known effects on the human environment that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks (EA Chapter 3, Section 3.10) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(5)).
6. These actions do not set a precedent for other projects proposed to meet the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. Any future decisions considered will need all relevant scientific and site-specific information available at that time (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(6)).
7. This action does not represent potential cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past or reasonably foreseeable actions (EA Chapter 3, pages 56, 61, 62, 69, 70, 75, 83, 85, 86, 88, 91, and 94). Also demonstrated in the EA is that without commercial thinning there could be potential adverse impacts (No Action Alternative, EA Chapter 3, pages 50, 60, 62, 68, 70, 72, 83, 85, 86, 87, 91, and 92) (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)).
8. Historic places or loss of scientific, cultural, or historic resources that may qualify for the National Register of Historic Places will not be adversely affected by this action (EA Chapter 3, Section 3.9).
9. This action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or critical habitat designated under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (EA Chapter 3, Sections 3.2 and 3.3; Biological Evaluation; Concurrence Letter from the USDI FWS).
10. The actions will not violate federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Carrying out the proposed actions in a way that is consistent with the standards and guidelines, management requirements, and mitigation measures established in the Forest Plan will ensure this. No historic

or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic river, or ecologically critical areas will be impacted. We will protect riparian areas by application of the Forest Plan standards and mitigation measures as specified in the EA Chapter 1, Section 1.5. There are no known significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable loss of timber production, wildlife habitats, soil production, or water quality.

### **Findings Required by NFMA and Other Laws:**

1. This project amend the Forest Plan's current allocation of the Breezy Hill Trail from hiking, biking, and horse travel recreational opportunities to hiking, biking, and motorized use (motorcycle). All proposed management actions within the selected alternative are consistent with the management objectives, Standards, and Guidelines for the management areas on the Catahoula Ranger District. We will apply mitigation measures specified in the EA to the planned actions. The project is feasible and reasonable, and results in applying management practices that meet the Forest Plan overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services.
2. These actions take place in Sub-Management Areas 5CL, 5CS, and 5CM. The actions fully comply with the specific prescriptions for these management areas as well as other Forestwide management requirements (Forest Plan, pages 3-15 through 3-20).
3. The actions of this project, which alter vegetation, will comply with the requirements of 36 CFR 219.27 by following the Forestwide standards and guidelines.
4. In consultation with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and interested Tribal Historic Preservation Officers (THPO), a heritage resources inventory of the project area was conducted and identified no significant cultural properties.
5. In accordance with FSM 2672.4, a Biological Evaluation was prepared to evaluate the effects of the planned activities of PETS species. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the determinations of the PETS species.
6. The effect of the proposed actions on Management Indicator Species (MIS) will be minimal. Acres of suitable habitat is not expected to change and conditions desired by the Revised Land Management Plan for the project area will not be adversely affected. Forestwide MIS conditions and trends will continue to be monitored and reported annually to document that this assumption can be supported.
7. The actions do not occur within a 100-year floodplain of a jurisdictional wetland.

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### **Appeal Opportunities, Contact, and Implementation:**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in the *Alexandria Town Talk*. The publication date of the legal notice in the *Alexandria Town Talk* is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal and those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

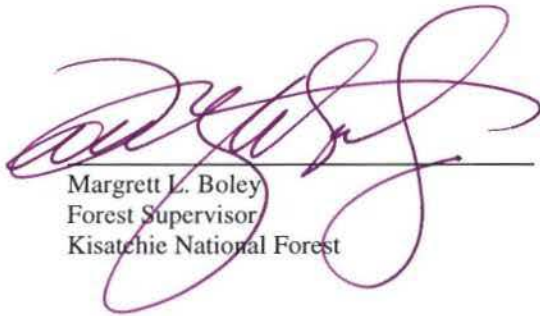
Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal.

The Appeal shall be sent to USDA, Forest Service, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1720 Peachtree Rd., N.W., Suite 811N, Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102, within 45 days of the date of this legal notice. Appeals may be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to [appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us).

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition (36 CFR 215.9).

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Cynthia A. Dancak, 2500 Shreveport Highway, Pineville, Louisiana 71360; telephone (318) 473-7160.

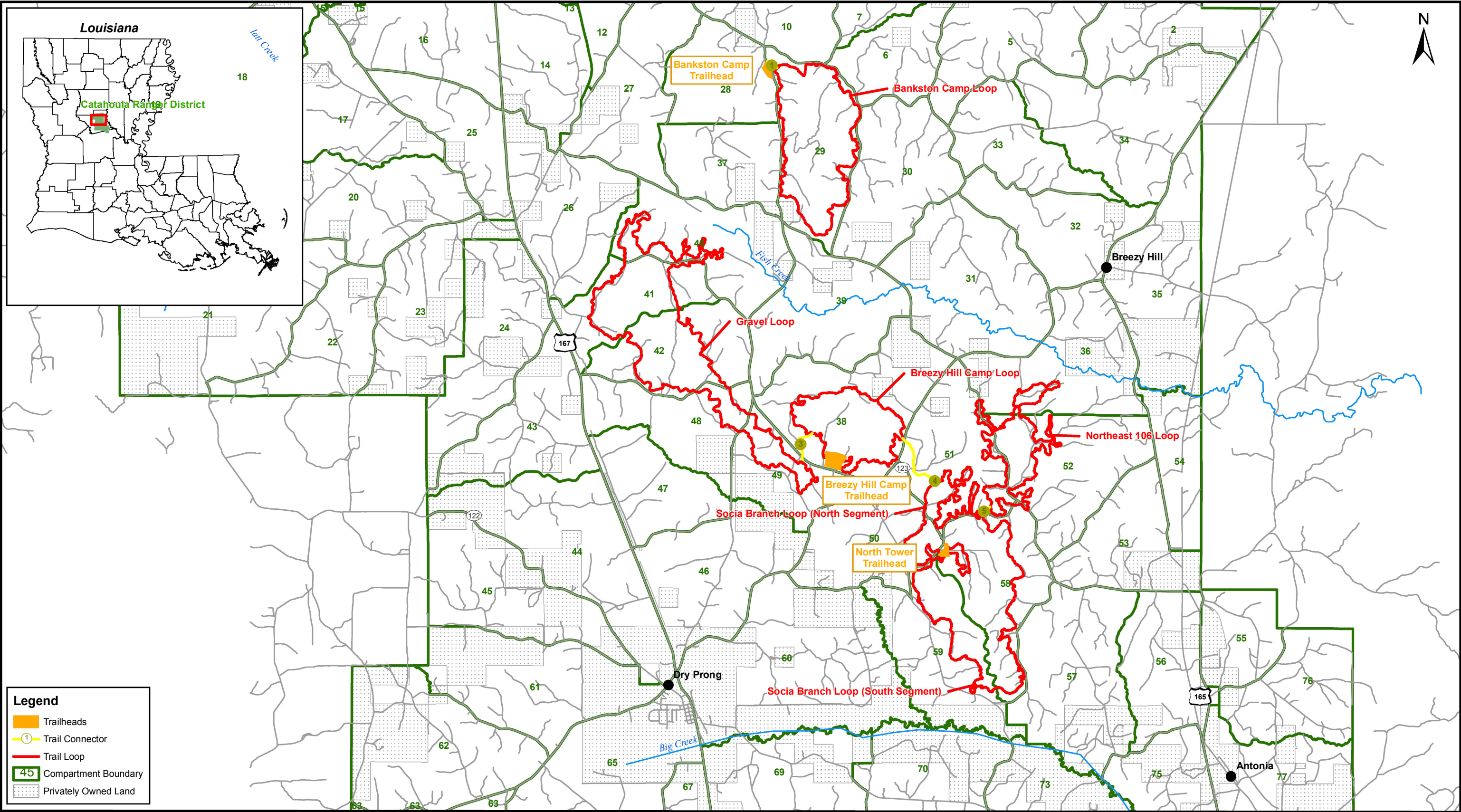
For further information on the planned actions, please contact Barbara Poole, Other Resource Assistant, at the Catahoula Ranger District ((318) 765-3554, blpoole@fs.fed.us) for additional information.



Margrett L. Boley  
Forest Supervisor  
Kisatchie National Forest

April 10, 2006  
Date





**ALTERNATIVE 4 MAP**  
Breezy Hill Trail  
Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact  
Catehoula Ranger District  
Kisatchie National Forest, Louisiana



Figure: 1  
Date: September 2005  
Scale: 1:75,000  
Source: GEC  
Map Author: C. Perez

