Decision Notice

& Finding of No Significant Impact

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment Updating Gopher Tortoise, Bald Eagle, Flatwoods Salamander and Florida Scrub-jay Direction

(LRMP Amendment 8)

USDA Forest Service
National Forests in Florida
Baker, Columbia, Franklin, Lake, Leon, Liberty, Marion, Putnam, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, Wakulla, and Walton Counties, Florida

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

Due to changes in federally listed species, and information identified in a Landscape Scale Assessment prepared on the Ocala National Forest in 2008, it was determined that portions of the wildlife management direction in the 1999 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) needed to be updated. This amendment was prepared to reflect new guidance, clarify current standards and modify sand pine/scrub habitat Management Areas 8.1, 8.2, and 8.4.

Decision

Based upon my review of the Environmental Assessment, the project record, including public and other agency comments, and the 1999 Revised LRMP, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 with modifications based on public review of the Environmental Assessment. This alternative as modified will:

1) Combine current sand pine/scrub habitat management areas (8.1 and 8.2), and increase the maximum opening size in sand pine/scrub habitat to 800 acres on the Ocala National Forest to improve nesting habitat for the Florida scrub-jay and other endemic scrub species.
2) Update Forest-wide objective #9 to redefine the optimum age range of suitable nesting habitat for the Florida scrub-jay, (from 3-15 years of age to 3-12 years of age).
3) Improve the efficiency of gopher tortoise protection standards by focusing efforts in potential habitat and adding monitoring items to better estimate suitable tortoise habitat and population estimates.
4) Clarify flatwoods salamander standards to describe conditions appropriate for mechanized use and habitat improvement efforts within known and potential flatwoods salamander breeding pond buffers.

5) Identify Salamander Conservation Areas where potential breeding ponds exist, but have not yet been identified. This will increase the number of ponds evaluated and identify opportunities for habitat enhancement at the project level.
6) Remove current bald eagle wildlife standards and replace with a reference to the most recent National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines published by the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2007 to avoid conflicting guidance.

The original proposed action (Alternative 2) was modified based on public comments. The modifications include:

1) Adding two Forest Plan Monitoring items to evaluate gopher tortoise habitat and population estimates.
2) Combining Forest-wide standards WL-16 and WL-17 and focusing direction on improving salamander habitat rather than limiting specific practices in both known active and potential salamander ponds.
3) Removing the original proposal to reduce the habitat objective acres for Florida scrub-jay proportionally to the reduced age range for suitable nesting habitat.
4) A variety of editorial changes to clarify direction.

These modifications do not change any effects determinations in the Environmental Assessment as originally circulated for public comment in January 2009.

Reasons for the Decision

I have selected this alternative for the following reasons:

Gopher Tortoise Direction

Gopher Tortoise General Direction (LRMP page 3-28)

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission published a Gopher Tortoise Management Plan in September 2007. This amendment will update general gopher tortoise direction to reference the most recent Gopher Tortoise Management Plan.

This amendment will also help to better evaluate high quality suitable gopher tortoise habitat and estimate population trends with the addition of two Forest Plan monitoring questions.

Forest-wide Standard and Guideline WL-11 (LRMP page 3-28)

As currently worded, standard WL-11 requires the Forest Service to survey for gopher tortoise burrows in stands with little or no likelihood of presence. Most harvesting occurs in stands of dense timber making this standard costly and inefficient. This amendment will improve efficiency of timber sale preparation activities and focus efforts to improve and protect gopher tortoise habitat where they are most likely to occur.

In addition, the revised standard and guideline is expected to improve our ability to locate previously unknown burrows. This will be accomplished by utilizing the improved vantage point of equipment operators during project implementation.

Forest-wide Standard and Guideline RE-4 (LRMP page 3-14)

This guideline was intended to protect gopher tortoise burrows from impacts from construction of new trails but has caused concern during site-specific project planning. This amendment will help clarify applicable situations for designating and constructing new trails with respect to gopher tortoise protection.

Bald Eagle Direction

Bald Eagle General Direction (LRMP page 3-27)
The bald eagle, formerly a threatened species in the lower 48 states under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), has been delisted because it has recovered from being at risk of extinction. It will continue to be protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (Eagle Act) and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). On National Forest System (NFS) lands, it also will continue to be protected by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA).

This amendment will reference the most recent version of the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines and improve consistency of direction.

Forest-wide Standard and Guideline WL-4 (LRMP page 3-27) and WL-5 (LRMP page 3-27)
This amendment will remove the current outdated direction and follow the most recent version of the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines to avoid conflicting direction and implement the most recent and comprehensive direction for protecting the Bald Eagle.

Flatwoods Salamander Direction

Forest-wide Standard and Guideline WL-16 (LRMP page 3-29 to 3-30) and WL-17 (LRMP page 3-30)
This amendment will clarify conditions for operations within both known and potential flatwoods salamander pond buffers. It will increase the area of protection by including applicability of this Standard and Guideline for buffers around potential salamander breeding ponds and increasing emphasis on restoration needs within these areas.

New Forest-wide Standard and Guideline WL-19a (LRMP page 3-27)
The US Fish and Wildlife Service recently identified areas of Critical Habitat for the flatwoods salamander on the Apalachicola and Osceola National Forests.

By identifying areas with a high potential for flatwoods salamander breeding ponds as "Flatwoods Salamander Conservation Areas", this amendment will help to identify ponds where populations are not known to exist, but may be present. In addition, analyses conducted at the project level will better consider appropriate habitat management needs for these potential breeding ponds.

Florida Scrub-jay Direction

Forest-wide Objective #9 (LRMP page 2-5 and Page E-44)
The current description of suitable scrub-jay nesting habitat of 3-15 years of age is not consistent with more recent indications that 3-12 years provides better quality nesting habitat. This

amendment will modify the definition of ages suitable for scrub-jay nesting habitat and more accurately reflect suitable habitat.

Management Area 8.1 (Sand Pine, Natural Regeneration, Large Openings), Management Area 8.2 (Sand Pine, Mixed Regeneration, Moderate Openings), and Management Area 8.4 (Scrub-jay)
Research by Forest Service biologists and consultation with other scrub-jay experts indicates that smaller openings originally prescribed by the LMP may be causing unnecessary fragmentation of the scrub-jay landscape. By increasing the maximum allowable size of openings to 800 acres and encouraging the connectivity of nearby units, we can increase the number of scrub-jay territories and also provide habitat for species with smaller home ranges that make use of even earlier seral stages than do the scrub-jays such as the sand skink and the scrub lizard.

Re-allocating MA 8.1 acres to MA 8.2 will simplify Forest Plan management direction and is expected to accelerate treatment of sand pine/scrub habitat. In addition, providing guidance on site preparation activities will help maintain biological legacies to aide recolonization of a disturbed site by scrub-jays, scrub lizards, and most of the scrub endemic plants is needed.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the No Action Alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 12-13.

Alternative 1 ***No Action***

Under the No Action alternative, the current 1999 Revised LRMP would not be amended.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in July 2008. A letter was mailed July 31, 2008 notifying 275 individuals, groups and other agencies of our intention and requesting any comments or potential issues on the proposed. Comments from initial scoping are on file and available for review. On January 22, 2009 a pre-decisional EA was released for a 30-day comment period. The EA was also published on the National Forests in Florida web site beginning January 22, 2009. Comments are summarized in Appendix B of the EA.

Based on public comment and internal review, no significant issues were identified for this amendment, and no other alternatives were needed. Questions and concerns identified during public review were addressed by modifying the initial Proposed Action as described in this Decision Notice and in the Environmental Assessment.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base by finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmenal effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and does not authorize any site-specific projects (see EA page 14).

3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and does not authorize any site-specific projects (see EA page 14).

4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial because there is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the amendment (see EA pages 11, 14-27). My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk". This review complies with the requirement of Best Available Science as described in the 2000 Planning Rule as amended.

5. The National Forests in Florida has considerable experience with the management of habitat for federally listed species. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA pages 14-27).

6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and does not authorize any site-specific projects (see EA page 14).

7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA pages 14-27).

8. 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 this amendment is a for a programatic LRMP and does not authorize any site-specific projects (see EA page 14). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

9. 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 because this amendment is a for a programatic LRMP and does not authorize any site-specific projects (see EA page 14). The effects on federally listed species was evaluated in a Biological Assessment. The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the findings of this assessment in a letter on July 14, 2009. It is believed that this amendment will benefit federally listed species when impelemented through site-specific projects.

10. 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 (see EA pages 26-27).

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

NFMA Significance:
The Forest Service is currently operating under the November 9, 2000 planning rule and the Interpretive Rule of September 29, 2004. According to 36 CFR 219.35 (and subsequently interpreted in 2004), the responsible official may elect to conduct the plan amendment process under the "1982 planning regulations" (those regulations in effect before November 9, 2000). I have elected to conduct this amendment following the 1982 planning regulations. After reviewing the Environmental Assessment that includes Amendment # 8 to the Forest Plan, I have determined that the decision to implement this amendment will not result in a significant change to the Forest Plan. This determination was made after consulting 16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f) (1982 regulations), Forest Service Manual 1926.51 – *Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Not Significant* and FSM 1926.52 – *Changes to the Land Management Plan that are Significant* . Based on these planning requirements, I have determined that:

1) This amendment will not significantly alter the levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan; nor will it prevent the opportunity to achieve those outputs in later years.
2) The amendment will not significantly affect the entire plan or a large portion of the planning area. Direction for Florida scrub-jay will affect activities occurring in MA 8.1, 8.2 and 8.4 (approximately 217,000 acres) and areas of known and potential flatwoods salamander ponds (approximately 33,000 acres).
3) Changes in standards and guidelines are minor and designed to increase protection levels.

Implementation Date

Implementation of this decision may occur after seven calendar days following publication of the legal notice of the decision in the Tallahassee Democrat.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

For those plan amendments conducted under "1982 planning regulations" the responsible official can elect to use either the "Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period" (the former 36 CFR 217 appeal procedures that were in effect prior to November 9, 2000) or the Objection procedures of 36 CFR 219.32 from the 2000 planning rule (see Appendix A to 36 CFR 219.35 [Federal Register, January 10, 2001]). For this decision, I have decided to use the "Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period". These procedures are available at http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/includes/PlanAppealProceduresDuringTransition.pdf

A written appeal must be filed in duplicate, clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal pursuant to the "Optional Appeal Procedures", and it must meet the content requirements of Section 9 of the Optional Appeal Procedures. Appeals must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record (*Tallahassee Democrat*).

Appeals must be filed with the Regional Forester for the Southern Region at:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer
1720 Peachtree Road, NW, Suite 811N
Atlanta, GA 30309-9102

Appeals may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401 or mailed electronically in a common digital format to *appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us*. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., closed on federal holidays.

Pursuant to Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures, implementation of this decision will not begin until seven calendar days after the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record. Should any project or activity under this amendment be implemented before an appeal decision can be issued, the Appeal Reviewing Officer will consider written requests to stay implementation of any of those decisions pending completion of the review. To request a stay of implementation, an appellant must file a written request with the Appeal Reviewing Officer, and the request must meet the requirements found in Section 10 of the Optional Appeal Procedures.

The Forest Plan Amendment Project Record is available for public review at the National Forests in Florida Forest Supervisors Office, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303. Copies of the Environmental Assessment and questions concerning this document can be directed to David Harris, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, FL 32303 or (850) 523-8582. This amendment is also available on the internet at http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida/apalachicola/resources/planning.php?p=1.1.6.1

/s/ *Susan Jeheber-Matthews* August 5, 2009

Susan Jeheber-Matthews Date
Forest Supervisor

AMENDED PAGES

The following pages from the 1999 Revised LRMP have been modified based on comments received during public review of the Environmental Assessment.

Deleted language is indicated by a ~~strikethrough.~~ Additions are indicated by **bold** font. Note that some changes to acreage figures and the allocation map in the following pages are the result of updated GIS information and are not the result of this amendment.

Amended Forest Plan Page 3-28

Gopher Tortoise and Its Burrow Commensals. The gopher tortoise and its commensals are found in dry, sandy areas on Apalachicola, Ocala, and Osceola NFs. ~~The gopher tortoise is threatened in the western part of its range but not in Florida.~~ Gopher tortoise burrows provide habitat that is necessary for other threatened and sensitive species such as the eastern indigo snake. ~~among these are the Eastern indigo snake,~~ Guidelines for protection **of the Eastern Indigo Snake** are found in the *Eastern Indigo Snake Recovery Plan*, USFWS. **Guidelines for gopher tortoise protection are found in the most recent *Gopher Tortoise Management Plan, FWCC.*** Specific standards and guidelines include:

WL-11 ~~In all timber sale units, openings clearly mark a 15-foot buffer around the entrance to every gopher tortoise burrow. Keep heavy equipment out of this buffer zone during both harvesting and regeneration.~~ **Educate field personnel and contractors in burrow identification. In potential gopher tortoise habitat, prohibit locating log landings, designating 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.**

Amended Forest Plan Page 3-14

RE-4 ~~Design new trails to avoid gopher tortoise burrows.~~ **Construction or designation of new system trails within potential gopher tortoise habitat should avoid known burrows.** In general, keep the trail at least 50 feet away from the burrow entrance. If a gopher tortoise makes a new burrow within 50 feet of an existing **designated** trail, it is not necessary to adjust the trail.

Amended Forest Plan Page 3-27

Bald Eagle. The Forest Service protects bald eagle breeding areas by meeting the guidelines established in the most recent version of ~~*Habitat Management Guidelines for the Bald Eagle in the Southeast Region*~~, ***NATIONAL BALD EAGLE MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES,*** USFWS, **the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Bald Eagle Management Plan, and Florida Wildlife Commission Rule F.A.C. 68A-16.002.** ~~Specific guidelines include:~~

~~WL-4 Within the primary nest zone (750-1,500 ft. radius from the nest site), prohibit:~~
~~1. Tree cutting, logging, construction, or mining.~~
~~2. Use of pesticides toxic to wildlife.~~
~~3. Felling snags.~~

~~WL-5 Within the secondary nest zone (750-5,280 ft. radius from the primary zone), restrict:~~
~~1. Construction of new roads and trails tending to facilitate access to the nest.~~
~~2. Use of pesticides toxic to wildlife.~~
~~3. Logging, land clearing and construction activities during nesting season~~

WL-16 Within ~~the primary buffer zone (600 ft. radius) of breeding ponds~~ **Critical Habitat established by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and within 1,500 feet of known and potential flatwoods salamander breeding ponds**:

1. Prohibit ~~mechanical site preparation~~ **activities that would not improve the long-term conservation value of habitat for the flatwoods salamander especially with respect to water chemistry, water flow or hydroperiod.**
2. ~~Use only selective harvest methods~~. **During project level development, evaluate opportunities to restore both upland and wetland flatwoods salamander habitat. Restoration opportunities may include creating open canopy pine forest with grassy ecotones around wetlands, restoring hydrology and drainage patterns, reducing shrub and hardwood encroachment, and increasing herbaceous vegetation.**
3. ~~Harvest will only occur during dry periods~~ **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 limit. Soil moisture exceeds the plastic limit if the soil can be rolled to a pencil size without breaking or crumbling.**
4. ~~Do not apply pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers, except directed foliar application of herbicide can be used to control noxious weeds. Injection, frill, girdle, thin-line basal spray or cut stump herbicides may be used to treat undesirable trees if prescribed fire cannot be employed.~~ **Use chemical treatment to control undesirable hardwoods, shrubs or noxious weeds in cases where fire or mechanical treatments are not effective. Only use herbicides labeled for application in and around wetlands that have a low toxicity for fish, amphibians and other wildlife. Selectively apply herbicides to undesirable trees and shrubs by injection, frill, girdle, thin-line basal spray, or cut-stump treatments. Compounds selected, methods of application, and time of application will be chosen to avoid direct and residual impacts to all life stages, and especially during the salamander egg/larval period (October to May).**

Amended Forest Plan Page 3-30

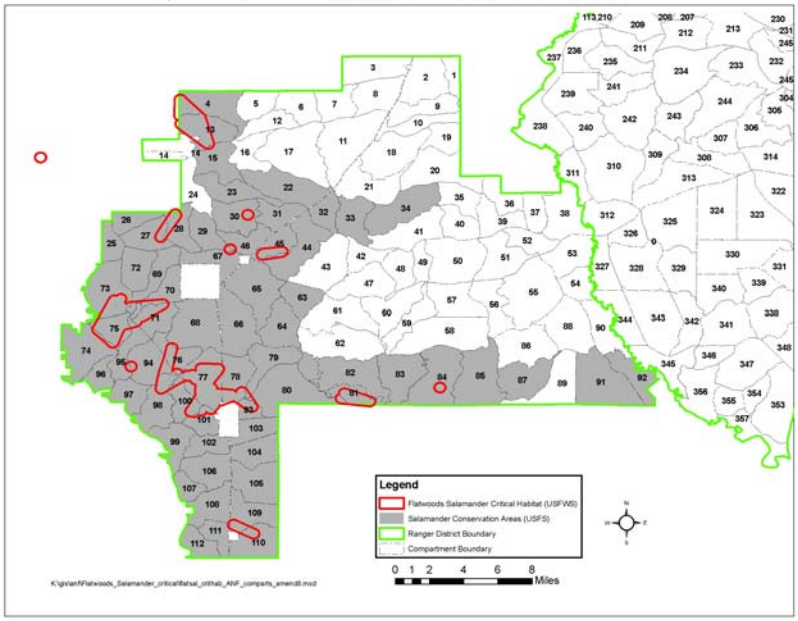
~~WL-17 Within the secondary buffer zone (600-1,500 ft. radius) of breeding ponds:~~

1. ~~Prohibit mechanical site preparation.~~
2. ~~If clearcutting is used, remove no more than 25 percent of the buffer in a single entry.~~
3. ~~Harvest will only occur during dry periods.~~
4. ~~Do not apply pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers, except directed foliar application of herbicide can be used to control noxious weeds. Injection, frill, girdle, thin-line basal spray or cut stump herbicides may be used to treat undesirable trees if prescribed fire cannot be employed.~~

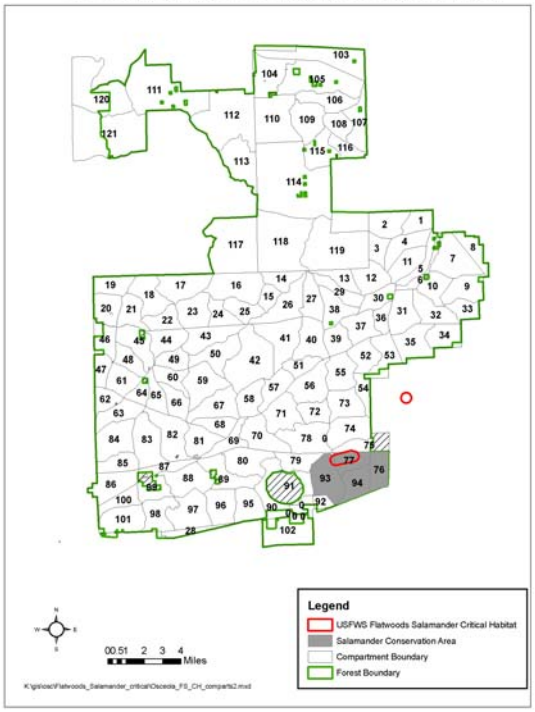
Amended Forest Plan Page 3-30a

WL-19a- Within Flatwoods Salamander Conservation Areas and Critical Habitat established by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, conduct inventories of potential ponds as funding and climatic conditions permit and evaluate opportunities for enhancing and maintaining salamander habitat. Salamander Conservation Areas are identified on the following maps.

Apalachicola NF Flatwoods Salamander Critical Habitat



Osceola NF Flatwoods Salamander Critical Habitat



Amended Forest Plan Page 4-46
Management Area 8.2
Sand Pine, Mixed Regeneration, Moderate Openings

Ocala NF

~~171,507~~ acres in LTA 1
~~170,518~~
184,432

~~9,157~~ acres in LTA 2
9,259

14,610 acres in LTA 3

~~74~~ acres in LTA 5
79

~~5,796~~ acres in LTA 6
5,818

~~201,143~~ **total acres**
~~199,291~~
214,198

VQO = 10% Preservation & 90% Modification
ROS = 20% Semiprimitive, Motorized & 80% Roaded Natural

Table 4.7
MA 8.2 Suitability for Timber Production

	Acres
Nonforestland	~~8,704~~ **8,855**
Inadequate Information	724
Developed Recreation Sites	79
Special Interest Areas	52
Threatened & Endangered Species Sites	226
Unsuitable Hardwood	~~11,955~~ **12,308**
Streamside Management Zones	~~846~~ **850**
Total Acres Unsuitable for Timber Production	~~**22,586**~~ **23,094**
Total Acres Suitable for Timber Production	~~**178,557**~~ **191,104**

Amended Forest Plan Page 4-46, cont.

8.2 Desired Future Condition

The overall desired condition is a landscape of large, regular shaped patches designed to reduce edge and fragmentation of the landscape as well as to facilitate the use of prescribed fire. Connectivity of young patches is emphasized to promote movement of scrub-jay and other species such as the sand skink and scrub lizard.

Approximately one-fifth of the area contains openings up to ~~160~~ **800** acres scattered ~~here and there~~ across the landscape, creating a mosaic of different aged stands that vary over time. ~~Most~~ **Many** seedlings are the result of ~~artificial~~ **natural** regeneration, ~~while some seedlings are the result of natural regeneration~~ **although artificial regeneration is usually needed to achieve minimum stocking requirements**. ~~so they~~ **Seedlings** are **usually** not ~~in~~ **discernible as** rows and their density can be variable from site to site. About ~~5~~ **10** percent of the stands ~~are~~ **may be** left to grow older. In these, trees start to lean and some die, giving the stand an increasingly open, crooked, and picturesque look, as well as providing an important habitat component **for a variety of species**. Each opening of up to ~~160~~ **800** acres provides contiguous suitable habitat for ~~3 to 6~~ **20 to 25** Florida scrub-jay territories. **An opening may be defined as a contiguous area of multiple stands of different sizes, but each within 0-6 years of stand establishment.**

Amended Forest Plan Page 4-47

8.2-3 Clearcuts **and resulting openings** ~~sizes should range from 80 to~~ ~~160~~ **may be as large as 800** acres. ~~Manage toward a minimum stand size of 80 acres.~~ Place ~~openings~~ **clearcuts** next to each other up to the ~~160~~ **800** acre maximum **opening** size. **Design openings to be as large as practical, up to the 800 acre maximum.** Stands contiguous with occupied scrub-jay territory are highest priority for harvest. Once the opening size reaches ~~160~~ **800** acres, do not allow further clearcutting adjacent to it until the ~~youngest~~ **oldest** stand reaches ~~3~~ **6** years of age. **Clearcuts should be shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain and avoid areas of special interest such as developed recreation sites.**

8.2-7 Post harvest treatments such as roller drum chopping are prescribed to create suitable ground conditions for sand pine seeding and for regeneration of other native scrub species. Scattered un-chopped areas of approximately 100 to 500 square feet in size are left randomly throughout the area, but preferably around remaining snags, green trees, gopher tortoise burrows, intermittent wet areas, and unit edges. These un-chopped areas would represent approximately 3-5% of the treated area.

Amended Forest Plan Page 2-5

Objective #9

Maintain a dynamic system of at least 45,000 to 55,000 acres of habitat capable of supporting scrub-jays **Forest-wide** on the Ocala NF**.** The 10-year population objective is 742 to 907 groups.

Amended Forest Plan Page 4-44

~~Management Area 8.1~~
~~Sand Pine, Natural Regeneration, Large Openings~~

~~Ocala NF~~ ~~14,736~~ ~~acres in LTA 1~~
~~74~~ ~~acres in LTA 2~~
~~14,810~~ **~~total acres~~**

~~VQO = 10% Preservation & 90% Modification~~
~~ROS = 20% Semiprimitive, Nonmotorized & 80% Roaded Natural~~

~~Table 4.6~~

~~MA 8.1 Suitability for Timber Production~~

	~~Acres~~
~~Nonforestland~~	~~151~~
~~Unsuitable Hardwood~~	~~353~~
~~Streamside Management Zones~~	~~4~~
~~Total Acres Unsuitable for Timber Production~~	**~~508~~**
~~Total Acres Suitable for Timber Production~~	**~~14,302~~**

Amended Forest Plan Page 4-45

~~8.1 Goal~~

~~To produce pine pulpwood under conditions that promote the growth and perpetuation of the species endemic to the Big Scrub area within the Ocala NF. To provide a wide range of opportunities for people to use and experience the forest.~~

~~8.1 Desired Future Condition~~

~~Approximately one-fifth of the area contains scattered openings up to 320 acres in size. Most seedlings are the result of natural regeneration, so they are not in rows and their density can be variable from site to site. About 5 percent of the stands are left to grow older. In these, trees start to lean and some die, giving the stand an increasingly open, crooked, and picturesque look, as well as retaining an important habitat component. Each opening of up to 320 acres provides contiguous suitable habitat for 8 to 13 Florida scrub-jay territories.~~

~~8.1 Standards and Guidelines~~

~~Range~~

~~8.1-1~~ ~~Prohibit range allotments.~~

~~Recreation~~

~~8.1-2~~ ~~Only allow camping areas at development level 1, 2, or 3.~~

~~Vegetation~~

~~8.1-3~~ ~~Make clearcuts as large as possible, up to a maximum size of 320 acres. Openings may be placed next to each other up to the maximum size of 320 acres. Stands contiguous with occupied scrub-jay territory are highest priority for harvest. Once the opening size reaches 320 acres, do not allow further clearcutting adjacent to it until the youngest stand reaches 3 years of age. Manage toward a minimum stand size of 80 acres.~~

~~8.1-4~~ ~~Emphasize site preparation for prescribed fire. Delay burning if active nesting is present. When needed, mechanical site preparation is permitted.~~

~~8.1-5~~ ~~Use natural regeneration, wherever possible. If this fails, use artificial seeding with seed from the general forest area.~~

~~Wildlife and Fish~~

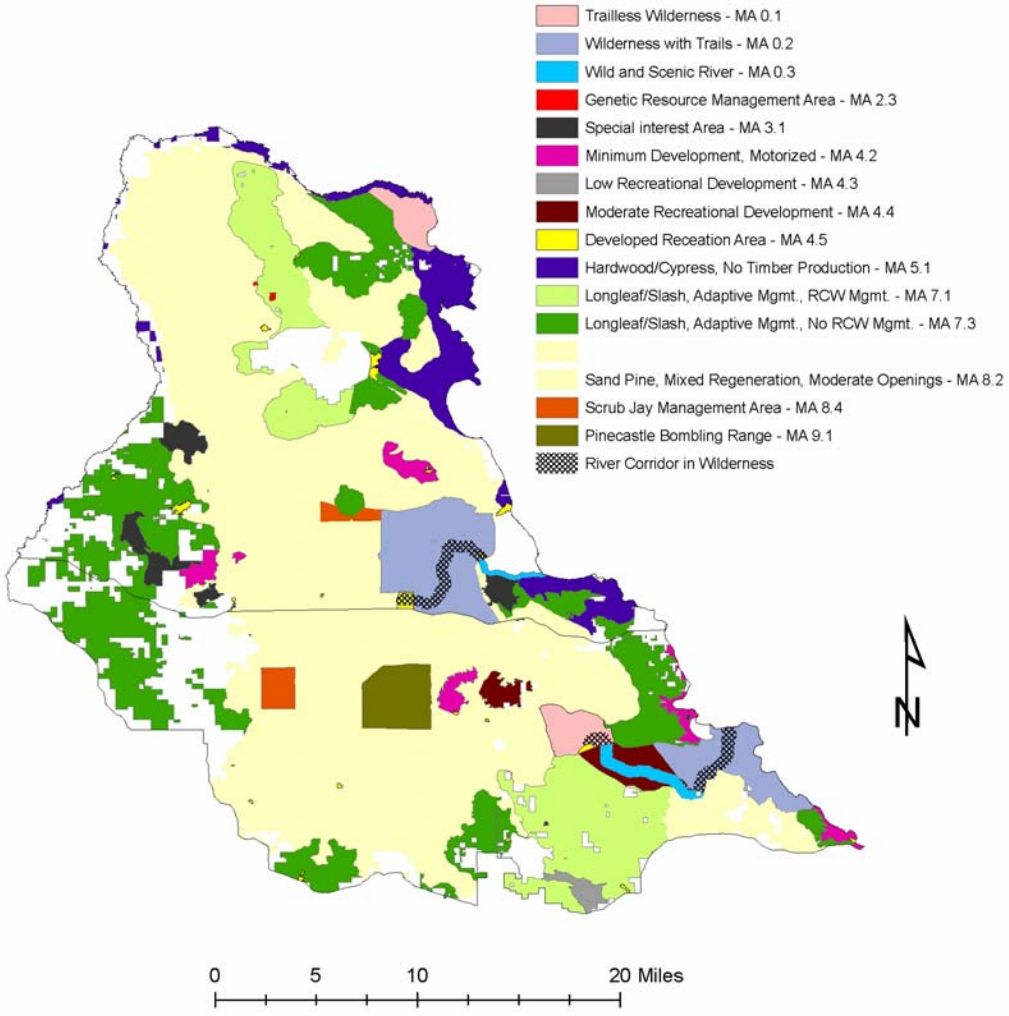
~~8.1-6~~ ~~Following timber harvest, establish 1 acre stands of scrub for every 25 acres of clearcut to provide nesting habitat for scrub-jay. Protect the 1 acre stands during site preparation.~~

~~8.1-7~~ ~~Do not site prepare understocked stands 3 years old and older if scrub-jays are present in the stand.~~

Amended Forest Plan Page 4-3

Management Areas

Ocala National Forest



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MA 8.4, page 4-47

8.4 Desired Future Condition

In this area, the vegetation patterns consist of a mosaic of oak scrub patches. ~~each about 80 to 200 acres in size and each a different age than its neighbor~~, **Patch sizes are generally governed by the presence of effective burning boundaries, but may be as large as 800 acres.** Each patch is burned ~~at 10- to 20-year intervals. This is done~~ **as needed** to **ensure that 70% of the patch has oaks 3-6 feet tall** ~~keep the oak shrubs 3 to 10 feet tall~~ and to expose bare sand on the ground**.** The area looks different from the sand pine scrub in other management areas, because this area has only a very low density of sand pine overstory. Sand pine is deliberately removed by clearcutting, followed by frequent prescribed burns that kill sand pine seedlings as they try to establish. These conditions remain suitable for Florida scrub-jays for the next 15 to 20 years, but they gradually deteriorate as the shrubs fill in and the bare sand becomes covered with litter. At this point, the patch is burned to reset the conditions for the scrub-jay and other species. Evidence of plowed fire lines around previous fires is frequently encountered. The landscape is rarely interrupted by narrow road corridors.

Monitoring Task Sheet, Forest Plan page E-44

Goal/DFC: 6 8 Adequate habitat is provided for threatened, endan-
9 gered, and sensitive species so populations are no
longer at risk.

Objective: 9 & 21

Standard: VG-27, 8.1-6,
8.2-5, 8.2-6

Monitoring purpose:

Question(s): How many acres are suitable for scrub-jays?

Monitoring item: Number of acres of sand pine in ~~3-15~~ **3-12** year age class ~~of sand pine.~~

Range of acceptable results: 45,000 to 55,000 acres.

Reliability: High Precision: High

Collection of Information

Who collects: Ecosystem Staff
(district, research, co-op, etc.)

Method of collection: Query CISC data base for age class distribution.
(specific)

Time and frequency of collection: Annually

Source of data (field, research, data base, etc.): CISC data base

Cost of collections: $250

Analysis/Evaluation of Findings

Who conducts: Ecosystem Staff, Planning ID Team

Method of analysis: Compare acres in ~~3-15~~ **3-12** year age class with objective at end of 5th year. **Management Areas unsuitable for timber production will be evaluated based on habitat conditions rather than age.** If outside acceptable range, determine cause.

Results:

- Within range of acceptable results: Y N
- Monitoring purpose achieved: Y N
- Further monitoring required: Y N
- Recommended actions: Y N

Recommended actions implemented: (Date)

Cost of A/E: $500

Total cost of monitoring: $750

Report of Findings

Information to be reported: Acres of sand pine scrub in ~~3-15~~ **3-12** year age class.

Frequency of report: Annually

Method of reporting: Annual M&E Report

Target audience for report: General

Monitoring Task Sheet, Forest Plan page E-58

Monitoring Task Sheet

Goal/DFC: 6, 8, 9 — Adequate habitat is provided for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species so populations are no longer at risk.

Objective: 9 & 21

Standard: WL-11

Monitoring purpose:

Question(s): How many acres provide high quality habitat suitable for gopher tortoise?

Monitoring item: Forested acres on dry or sandy soils between 3-8 years old, or with open canopy cover.

Range of acceptable results: 70,000 – 80,000 acres.

Reliability: High Precision: High

Collection of Information

Who collects: Ecosystem Staff
(district, research, co-op, etc.)

Method of collection: Query FSVEG and soils data base for age class distribution.
(specific)

Time and frequency of collection: Annually

Source of data (field, research, data base, etc.): FSVEG data base

Cost of collections: $250

Analysis/Evaluation of Findings

Who conducts: Ecosystem Staff, Planning ID Team

Method of analysis: Compare acres in 3-8 year age class or with open canopy cover with objective at end of 5th year. If outside acceptable range, determine cause.

Results:

Within range of acceptable results:	Y	N
Monitoring purpose achieved:	Y	N
Further monitoring required:	Y	N
Recommended actions:	Y	N

Recommended actions implemented: (Date)

Cost of A/E: $500

Total cost of monitoring: $750

Report of Findings

Information to be reported: Forested acres on dry or sandy soils between 3-8 years old, or with open canopy cover.

Frequency of report: Annually

Method of reporting: Annual M&E Report

Target audience for report: General

Monitoring Task Sheet, Forest Plan page E-59

Monitoring Task Sheet

Goal/DFC: 6 9 8 — Adequate habitat is provided for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species so populations are no longer at risk.

Objective:

Standard: WL-11

Monitoring purpose:

Question(s): What are the population trends of the gopher tortoise?

Monitoring item: Develop a protocol for estimating population trends of the gopher tortoise.

Range of acceptable results: Stable or increasing trends.

Reliability: High Precision: High

Collection of Information

Who collects: Ecosystem Staff
(district, research, co-op, etc.)

Method of collection: A monitoring protocol is developed within 1 year of Forest Plan Amendment 8.
(specific)

Time and frequency of collection: Every 5-years.

Source of data (field, research, data base, etc.): FSVEG data base

Cost of collections: $5000

Analysis/Evaluation of Findings

Who conducts: Ecosystem Staff, Planning ID Team

Method of analysis: To be determined.

Results:

- Within range of acceptable results: Y N
- Monitoring purpose achieved: Y N
- Further monitoring required: Y N
- Recommended actions: Y N

Recommended actions implemented: (Date)

Cost of A/E: $1,000

Total cost of monitoring: $6,000

Report of Findings

Information to be reported: Changes in number of gopher tortoise.

Frequency of report: 5 Years

Method of reporting: 5-year review

Target audience for report: General

Amended Table 5.1 Monitoring Program (includes changes from Forest Plan Amendments 2, 3 and 8).

Goals	Objectives	Standards & Guidelines	Question	Item to Measure	Acceptable Range	Report Frequency
~~1,5~~	~~1~~	~~N/A~~	~~Are people satisfied with service from the national forests in Florida?~~	~~Public survey~~ ~~Public inquiries~~	~~Baseline~~	~~5 Year Review~~
~~2~~	~~N/A~~	~~N/A~~	~~How much public participation do we have?~~	~~Status Report~~	~~Baseline~~	~~Annual~~
~~3 4~~	~~2~~	~~N/A~~	~~Have partnerships been strengthened?~~	~~Status Report~~	~~Baseline~~	~~Annual~~
5	N/A	N/A	How are we contributing to the socioeconomic well-being?	Returns to counties, indirect benefits through timber, recreation, range allotments, status report on rural development propgrams	Baseline	Annual
6, 8-10	3	VG-16	How much off-site slash pine has been restored to other types?	Acres type-converted from slash pine to other spp.	10,000-15,000 acres by clearcut and 8,000 acres by removal in 10 years	Annual
		VG-18	Has soil disturbance been minimized in preparing longleaf and slash pine sites for tree regeneration?	Percent of the area treated with soil displacement	No more than 10% of the area treated with soil displacement	Annual
			Are we collecting data on understory structure?	CISC report data on understory field	Increasing trend in stands with data collected	Annual
6, 8-9	7	DFC 8.2-4	How much off-site sand pine has been restored, and to what other types?	Acres type-converted from off-site sand pine to other species	500-1,000 acres in 10 years	Annual
6, 8-10	4	N/A	What is the burning interval of upland pine acres?	Acres of upland pine burned	3-year average interval over 10-year period	Annual
			In what months have they been burned?	Acres burned by month	Increasing trend toward 50% between March 15 and Sept. 30 and 20% between May 1 and July 31	Annual
6, 8-10	5	N/A	How many acres have been offered for thinning?	# acres thinning harvest offered	45,000 to 50,000 acres in 10 years	Annual
6, 8-10	6	N/A	How many acres have we initiated uneven-aged management harvest on?	# acres offered with uneven-aged harvest	30,000 to 33,500 acres in 10 years	Annual
6, 8-10	18	N/A	How many acres have we initiated irregular shelterwood harvest?	# acres offered with irregular shelterwood harvests	1,800 to 2,000 acres in 10 years	Annual
6, 8-10	19	N/A	How many acres of sand pine have had a regeneration harvest?	# acres offered with sand pine regeneration harvest	39,000 to 41,000 acres in 10 years	Annual
~~11~~	~~N/A~~	~~N/A~~	~~Do forest visitors understand Forest Service practices and do they value and respect the resource being interpreted?~~	~~# of opportunities and facilities (signs, talks, brochures) per district and quality~~	~~≥ 2 facilities at each district that met MM standards~~	~~Annual~~
12	11	N/A	What percent of each type of recreation site (at least 1 swimming, 1 hiking, 1 fishing) is accessable? (Level 3 and above)	% of accessible by type of recreation site	(Level 3 and up) ≥ 20%	Annual
13	12	N/A	Are developed recreation facilities providing MM standard for safety, cleanliness, and service? Do they reflect quality and customer service?	Evaluations of each facility component are define by MM standards and customer survey forms	Compliance to MM standards and 90% customer satisfaction	Annual

Amended Table 5.1 Monitoring Program (includes changes from Forest Plan Amendments 2, 3 and 8).

Goals	Objectives	Standards & Guidelines	Question	Item to Measure	Acceptable Range	Report Frequency
14	13, 14	N/A	What system of trails has been designated on the ground, and are they maintained at appropriate level?	Miles of trails, by type and condition	Baseline	Annual
			How many miles of Florida National Scenic Trail have been certified for public use?	# miles of Florida National Scenic Trail certified	≥ 750 miles for 10 years	Annual
15	N/A	N/A	Have rivers been recommended as wild and scenic, and what is their status?	Status of Record of Decision/Legislative EIS	Recommend = yes	Annual
16	N/A	N/A	Has wilderness character been protected?	% of land in primitive and semiprimitive Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classes, trail use data, Ecosystem plots	Baseline	Annual
5-6	N/A	N/A	Has Natural Area wilderness study area been recommended for release?	Status of Record of Decision/Legislative EIS	Recommend = yes	Annual
18	16-17	Lands Standards & Guidelines	Have land purchases and exchanges met the objectives established in the Forest Plan?	Itemized by map what has been gained and what has been exchanged Miles of landlines maintained	≥ Itemized list in objectives Average 7-year cycle.	Annual
14	13	AC-1, AC-2	Is the access policy having the desired effect of protecting the resources?	Photopoints at areas of resource concern	Improving site conditions; i.e., less bare soil, less disturbed vegetation, more vegetation	Annual
6-7	N/A	N/A	Are aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems being impaired by acid deposition?	Change in water chemistry regarding acid neutralization	No significant decline in neutralization capacity	5-years
6-7	N/A	WL-21	Which water bodies were fertilized?	Report which water bodies were fertilized	Lakes itemized in standards and guidelines	Annual
5	N/A	VG-33	How much of each “special forest product” did we give permits to be collected and in what locations?	Quantity of each type, ranger district and compartment	Baseline	Annual
5	N/A	VG-29	How much timber was offered for sale?	MCF of timber offered annually by type, product, and forest	Not to exceed 103 MMCF in 10 years	Annual
6-9	N/A	FI-7, FI-8	How many miles of firelines were plowed for prescribed fire and wildfires?	Miles of plowed firelines for each purpose	Decreasing trend	Annual
			How many miles were restored?	Miles of plowed firelines restored	Increasing trend	Annual
N/A	N/A	LA-8 through LA-15	Are special-use permits in compliance and if not, what actins are taken?	# cases of noncompliance actions taken	Evaluation of actions taken	Annual

Amended Table 5.1 Monitoring Program (includes changes from Forest Plan Amendments 2, 3 and 8).

Goals	Objectives	Standards & Guidelines	Question	Item to Measure	Acceptable Range	Report Frequency
7, 15	N/A	WA-1 through WA-7	Is water quality being maintained?	Fecal coliform—swim sites; drinking water—recreation areas & admin. sites; chemistry—State well sites	Within State water quality criteria	Annual
6	N/A	WA-8, WA-9	Is air quality being maintained?	Particulates Ozone	Within State air quality standards	Annual
~~6~~	~~N/A~~	~~N/A~~	~~What are the effects of cattle grazing on vegetation?~~	~~Biotic index along a transect, include a transect across fence lines~~	~~No significant change in vegetation over time~~	~~5 Year Report~~
5	N/A	N/A	How many miles of roads have been converted to another use or otherwise closed?	Miles of roads closed and deleted in transportation inventory system updates	2-3% of long-term goal closed annually	5-years
6	N/A	8.1-3, 8.2-3	What is the size and distribution of openings in sand pine?	Size of opening	Not to exceed 160 acres Increasing trend in size	Annual
6, 8-10	8	RCW EIS Standards & Guidelines	Are we maintaining RCW Populations on the national forests in Florida?	# of effective groups; # active clusters, compartment group survey. **Cluster activity status, group size, nesting success, eggs laid per active group, chicks reaching banding age, and number fledged per active group**	Increasing trend	Annual
6, 8-9	9	VG-27, 8.1-6, 8.2-5, 8.2-6	How many acres are suitable for scrub-jay?	# acres in 3-15 year age class in sand pine, occupied stands	45,000 tp 55,000 acres	Annual
			What are the population trends of scrub-jay? How is management affecting scrub-jay?	Scrub-jay population demographics, reproduction, dispersion	Stable to increasing trend	Annual
6-10, 18	3-9	VG-27, WL-1 through WL-13	Are we maintaining viable populations of PETS animal species and habitats to support them?	Number of PETS animals or acres of suitable habitat	Populations at least at baseline levels, any increase acceptable. Monitoring for species with a low viability ranking due to lack of information will be designed to provide high to moderate reliability/precision results for needed information.	Annual

Amended Table 5.1 Monitoring Program (includes changes from Forest Plan Amendments 2, 3 and 8).

Goals	Objectives	Standards & Guidelines	Question	Item to Measure	Acceptable Range	Report Frequency
6-10, 18	3-7	VG-4, VG-19, VG-22, VG-23, VG-37, VG-38	Are we maintaining viable populations of PETS animal species and habitats to support them?	Locations and numbers of PETS plant populations	Populations at least at baseline levels or increasing. Monitoring for species with a low viability ranking due to lack of information will be designed to provide high to moderate reliability/precision results for needed information.	Annual
6-10, 18	3-9, 18-21	N/A	Is the health of natural forest communities being maintained or improved?	Management Indicators (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3)	Baseline	5-years
17	15	Heritage Resources Standards & Guidelines	Are heritage resource sites being evaluated and protected?	# sites evaluated Annual report on protection efforts	$\geq$ 5 evaluations per year	Annual
19	10		Are the scenic resources being protected, enhanced, and, where necessary, restored?	Implementation of the SMS and management of scenery according to recommendations of the SMS	More than or equal to 90% of all SMS critical/sensitive scenic corridors or viewsheds retain their scenic quality.	Annual
6, 8-10	6	VG-9 through VG-13, VG-17, VG-21	Is the group selection method producing the anticipated desired conditions in the longleaf pine ecosystem and what are the effects of group selection harvest in longleaf pine?	Tree stem diameter and frequency, frequency of seed crops, longleaf pine regeneration establishment and survival, growth and development of seedlings, pine midstory development and distribution, costs and returns of implementation of harvesting, costs and effects of burning within harvest units, plant species frequency and distribution, PETS species population trends/habitat conditions, MIS plant/animal population trends/habitat conditions.	Monitoring will be designed to allow comparison of effects to desired community conditions, MIS and PETS population trends/habitat conditions between areas treated with group selection vs. areas not treated. Researchers will be involved in designing the monitoring scheme along with appropriate statistical analysis and needed trigger points for changing management	5-years

Amended Table 5.1 Monitoring Program (includes changes from Forest Plan Amendments 2, 3 and 8).

Goals	Objectives	Standards & Guidelines	Question	Item to Measure	Acceptable Range	Report Frequency
6, 8-9	18	N/A	Is the irregular shelterwood method producing the anticipated desired conditions in the slash pine forest?	Growth and development of seedlings, costs and returns of implementation of harvesting, costs and effects of burning within harvest units, plant species frequency and distribution, PETS species effects/population trends	Baseline	5-years
6, 8-9	20	VG-40	Have old-growth stands been designated in each community type?	Acres of old growth by community type designated in CISC	Within 45-55% of acres identified in objective 20 in 5 years	5-years
6-9	21	N/A	What are the habitat conditions of the major habitat associations?	Acres of each habitat association by major forest type age class	Within 45-55% of acres identified in objective 21 in 5 years	5-years
~~6, 8-10~~	~~8~~	~~WL-1~~	~~What are the effects of the reduced foraging standards on the Apalachicola NF?~~	~~Cluster activity status, group size, nesting success, eggs laid per active group, chicks reaching banding age, and number fledged per active group~~	~~Decline in any variable for 3 consecutive years, initiate section 7 consolidation~~	~~Annual~~
1-19	1-21	All	Did we do what we said we would do?	Decision documents and field review of implementation	All projects are documented and implemented in accordance with Forest Plan directions	Annual
6,8,9	**3-5, 9, 19**	**WL-11**	**How many acres are suitable for gopher tortoise?**	**Open canopy stands on dry or sandy soils.**	**70,000 - 80,000 acres**	**Annual**
9		**WL-11**	**What are the population trends of the gopher tortoise?**	**Gopher tortoise population demographics, reproduction, dispersion**	**Stable to increasing trend**	**5-years**