USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Southern Region, National Forests in Alabama July 2026

Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report for the National Forests in Alabama

Fiscal Years 2024 - 2025

Eastern Indigo Snake, Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and Longleaf Pine Plantation on the Conecuh National Forest.

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Why Monitoring Matters

There is no single correct approach to managing a forest or grassland. Each decision maker must weigh the ecological complexity of the ecosystems, the social and economic contributions, the changing environmental conditions, the many different viewpoints of the public, and uncertainty about long-term consequences.

Data from monitoring can therefore be extremely useful. A robust, transparent, and meaningful monitoring program can provide information on specific resources, management impacts, and overall trends in condition – in other words, feedback on whether we are meeting our management objectives.

Every national forest or grassland has a land management plan that balances tradeoffs among recreation, timber, water, wilderness, wildlife habitat, and other uses. The plan describes a set of desired conditions – a science-based vision for the state of the forest or grassland once the goals of the plan are met. The land management plan includes a monitoring plan, organized around a set of monitoring questions and indicators that are designed to track progress toward achieving the desired conditions. Monitoring of certain resources is required by law, regulation, or policy (see box below for required monitoring topics). Other monitoring occurs depending on specific needs of the national forest or grassland. Under the current planning rule, monitoring questions developed for the monitoring plan must be "within the financial and technical capability" of the Forest Service, meaning that we must have the money and ability, including support from partners, to actually carry out the strategic monitoring outlined in the monitoring plan.

Every two years, each forest or grassland compiles and evaluates monitoring results and drafts a biennial monitoring evaluation report (BMER) like this one. If the monitoring report reveals that we are not quite meeting the mark, then there might be a need to change the land management plan, the management activities, the monitoring plan, or to reassess current conditions and trends—this is adaptively managing. Monitoring results allows us to learn through management and adjust our strategies based on what we learned. Monitoring also helps us be accountable and transparent to interested and affected parties and colleagues. BMERs are critical to adaptive management because they tell us and the public whether the land management plan is working. Although we don't make any decisions in BMERs, they are a great opportunity to document and share monitoring results.

Our land management plan is available on our website [Forest Plan] and the monitoring plan chapter is found in Chapter Five and Appendix F.

Monitoring questions must address the following topics (per 36 CFR sec. 219.12 and Forest Service Manual 1909.12 section 32.13 - Content of the Plan Monitoring Program):

(i) The status of select watershed conditions.

(ii) The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

(iii) The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions.

(iv) The status of a select set of ecological conditions to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern.

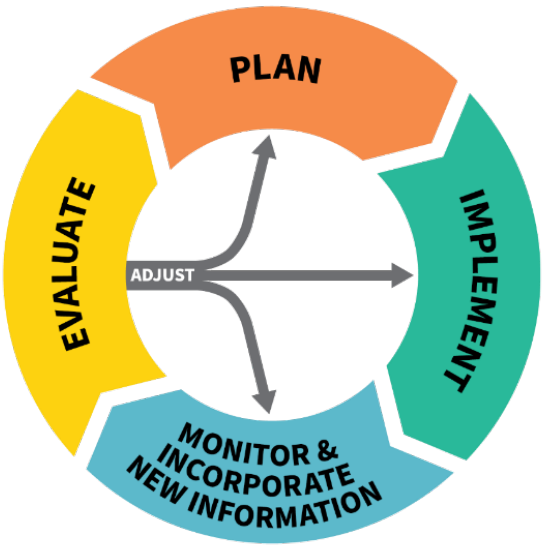
(v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.

(vi) Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.

(vii) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including providing multiple use opportunities.

(viii) The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land.

(viiii) Social, economic, and cultural sustainability must also be addressed in the monitoring plan because sustainability is an inherent part of several of the required monitoring items.



Adaptive Management Cycle

Partnerships and Data Sources

To accomplish our mission, the Forest Service partners with land management agencies across all levels of government, with nonprofit and for-profit entities, universities, and communities large and small. The diversity of our partners parallels the breadth of Forest Service work that includes: managing the nation's 193 million acres of National Forest System lands to sustain healthy terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems; conducting collaborative research that connects the agency to hundreds of partners around the world; supporting States, Tribes, communities, and nonindustrial private landowners through technical and financial assistance; protecting communities and the global environment from catastrophic wildland fires, climate change and invasive species; and inspiring life-long connections to nature for every American.

Monitoring can be expensive, time-consuming, and labor-intensive, so we rely on the help of our partners and work collaboratively with them to accomplish monitoring objectives. Some of the entities that we partner with are listed in Appendix A, Contributors and Partners.

We also rely on existing data sources such as national and regional inventory, monitoring, and research programs; Federal, State, or local government agencies; scientists, partners, and members of the public; and information from Tribal communities and Alaska Native Corporations.

Report Summary

This 2026 biennial monitoring evaluation report (BMER) for the National Forests in Alabama (NFsAL) documents monitoring activities that occurred during fiscal years (FY) 2024 through 2025. Resource specialists answered all of the 23 monitoring questions to determine if current activities described in the 2004 National Forests in Alabama Monitoring Plan are moving the forest toward or maintaining the desired conditions or objectives.

The detailed resource data and specialist reports that were used to build this monitoring report are available on request by contacting us at 2946 Chestnut Street, Montgomery, AL 36107 and (334) 832-4470 or comments-southern-alabama@usda.gov. Each new monitoring report builds upon the evaluations and recommendations that precede it. This monitoring evaluation report and previous reports are available at Forest Plan Monitoring where you can review previous recommendations made to move our forest toward the desired conditions and objectives in our land management plan.

Of the 23 monitoring questions examined, we are meeting plan objectives or progressing toward our desired conditions in 11 number monitoring questions. To move the National Forests in Alabama closer to the desired condition for vegetation and habitat, we need to increase active management of forests and shrublands to reduce fuels and promote regeneration of species like longleaf pine. We also need more active management to increase forest diversity at the landscape scale, expand early seral habitat, and minimize insect and disease outbreaks. Increasing active management will directly and indirectly increase social and economic contributions to the forest's area of influence.

Improved monitoring methods are needed to monitor wildlife and aquatic species. Several monitoring questions need to be refined to use existing relevant monitoring and data sources, capitalize on existing partnerships, and apply best available science. Additionally, we could develop more meaningful monitoring questions or indicators for assessing recreation in the forest and air quality trends.

Table 1 – Recommended Changes

The following table tallies our recommended changes based on evaluation of the monitoring questions addressed in this report. Briefly, it provides the overall totals for how many monitoring questions or indicators are meeting the Forest Plan direction, or whether changes to the Forest Plan, management activities, monitoring plan, or new assessment should be considered. See Table 15 at the end of this report for a more detailed summary of the monitoring questions, results, and recommendations.

Table 1. Adaptive management recommendations for all monitoring questions addressed in this report.

Recommendations	Yes	No	Uncertain
Land Management plan direction met	11	1	11
Change to land management plan	7	16	0
Change to management activities	2	14	7
Change to monitoring plan	5	16	2
Assessment	0	23	0

Forest Supervisor's Certification

This report documents the results of monitoring activities that occurred from fiscal year 2024 through fiscal year 2025 on the National Forests in Alabama.

I have evaluated the monitoring evaluation results presented in this report. I have examined the recommended changes to the 2004 Land Management Plan. I therefore consider the 2004 Land Management Plan sufficient to continue to guide land and resource management of the National Forests in Alabama and plan a deeper examination of the recommended changes through engagement with resource specialists.

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LINWOOD BUTLER
Forest Supervisor

Status of Select Ecosystem Conditions

Summary

The Forest Plan focuses on restoring native and rare ecosystems, with longleaf pine landscapes as the primary priority. Management efforts aim to reduce risks from insects, disease, and invasive species while maintaining watershed resilience and ecological diversity. Longleaf pine restoration continues to expand across the NFsAL, accompanied by significant increases in red-cockaded woodpecker populations and notable recovery achievements. Ongoing challenges include off-site tree encroachment, invasive plant spread, feral swine impacts, and continued Southern Pine Beetle activity.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 1. Are rare communities being protected, maintained, and restored?
- MQ 2. Are landscape-level and stand-level composition and structure of major forest communities within desirable ranges of variability?
- MQ 3. Are key successional stage habitats being provided?
- MQ 5. What is the status and trend in aquatic habitat conditions in relationship to aquatic communities?
- MQ 6. What are status and trends of forest health threats on the forest?
- MQ 15. Are watersheds maintained (and where necessary restored) to provide resilient and stable conditions to support the quality and quantity of water necessary to protect ecological functions and support intended beneficial uses?
- MQ 16. What are the conditions and trends of riparian area, wetland and floodplain functions and values?

Rare Communities

The number of active red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) clusters can be used as an indicator for upland pine-associated rare communities and associated species of concern. If active clusters increase over time, then it can be assumed that open pine habitats and the associated early seral understory habitat, are being maintained and are expanding on the landscape. The table below shows numbers for historical (2002), recovery goals, previous BMER results, and 2024 and 2025, active clusters per district.

Table 2. RCW Cluster Growth

Unit	FY 2002	Short Term (Plan Horizon) Population Goal	Long Term (Recovery) Population Goal	**FY 2022 Active Clusters**	**FY 2023 Active Clusters**	**FY 2024 Active Clusters**	**FY 2025 Active Clusters**
Conecuh	19	28	308	101	107	122	127
Oakmulgee	120	185	395	200	211	222	236
Shoal Creek	8	18	125	44	46	49	51
Talladega	0	10	110	28	35	41	46
Tuskegee	0	NA	NA	0	0	0	4

Figure 1. Yellow pitcher plant (Sarracenia flava) USDA Forest Service Photo by Lauren Wright.

Rare species and plant community monitoring was conducted across NFsAL. Several known pitcher plant bogs on Conecuh were visited by biologists. They remain open and have suitable conditions in most cases, regarding woody encroachment and maintenance by prescribed fire.

The one known Kentucky yellow lady slipper (*Cypripedium kentuckiense*) population for the NFsAL on Talladega was visited in April 2024 and March 2025 following flood. Flooding inundated several plants and deposited small levels of silt in the flood zone. Despite inundation, the population appears stable as compared to previous years with 6 and 5 flowering stems in 2024 and 2025, respectively.

A Harper's heartleaf (*Hexastylis speciosa*) study continues on Oakmulgee by researchers from Mississippi State University. In 2025, pollinators and seeds were collected and population genetic analyses were conducted to assess pollination ecology of this Regional Forester's Sensitive Species in response to observations of very limited fruiting and seed viability in these two populations.

White fringeless orchid surveys continue on Shoal Creek (3 existing sites) in 2024 by the Forest Biologist, and on Bankhead in 2024 and 2025 by numerous partners and Forest Service staff. Shoal Creek populations remain stable. The Bankhead surveys resulted in two new populations found this period. Additional areas of suitable habitat have been identified, and surveys of those areas are planned for 2026.

Indian Tomb Hollow (ITH) Glade on Bankhead was surveyed in late winter 2025 for the Federally Threatened fleshy-fruited gladecress (Leavenworthia crassa), with many flowering individuals observed. Additional visits addressed trespass/horse damage, wild pig impacts, and informal monitoring of RFSS Alabama larkspur (Delphinium alabamicum). Extensive pig damage reported in 2024 was assessed, and 17 pigs were carefully trapped and removed without causing further resource harm. Other Bankhead glades are being maintained through prescribed fire.

Figure 2. Slick Ford glade during prescribed burn. USDA Forest Service Photo by Kerry Clark.

The Federally Threatened Price's potato bean was monitored for flowering in July–August of 2024 and 2025, with populations appearing stable. A cave microclimate study continues in one bat hibernaculum on Bankhead. In 2025, partners documented two new populations of the imperiled small-flowered meadowbeauty (Rhexia parviflora) on Conecuh National Forest.

Major Forest Communities Structure and Composition and Key Successional Stages

America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative and the Million Acre Challenge (MAC)

In 2017, the Forest Service Southern Region issued the Million Acre Challenge to put an additional one million acres of NFS lands on the path towards longleaf pine restoration. As part of the challenge, the NFsAL identified a goal of restoring 40,970 acres of longleaf. Our strategy focuses on opportunities to achieve multiple goals, such as restoring forest health, red-cockaded woodpecker habitat, and open woodland structure and native, fire-maintained ecosystems. We work with partners, across landscapes, using many silvicultural and management tools towards these goals in collaboration across the range of longleaf through [America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative](). Refer to Appendix D for more details.

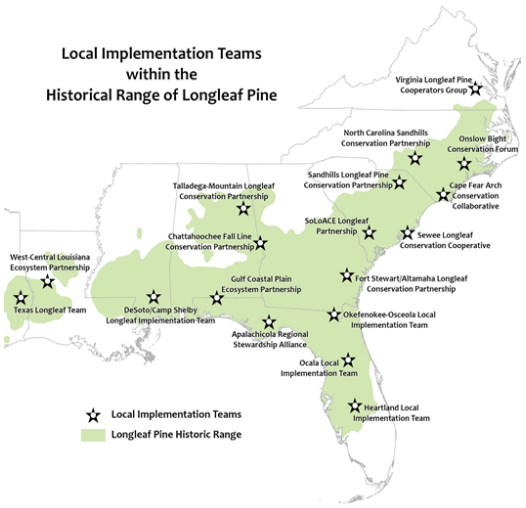


Figure 3. Local Implementation Teams within the Historical Range of Longleaf Pine in the Southern Region.

Table 3. Existing vs. Potential Acreage of Longleaf Pine Communities, NFsAL.

Forest Unit (Total Acres)	2002 LL Acreage	2023 LL Acreage	2025 LL Acreage	Remaining Restoration Opportunity (acres)	LRMP Long-term Objective Acreage*	Existing LL (2025) Acreage/ Total Objective(%)	Longleaf Composition of Total Forested Landscape** (%)
Longleaf Pine (NFsAL)	150,792	174,229	178,699	22,701	201,400	89%	27%
Bankhead (185K ac)	2,196	4,831	4,858	2,542	7,400	66%	2.6%
Conecuh (84K ac)	41,478	48,997	50,663	Exceeded Objective	50,000	101%	60%
Oakmulgee (158K ac)	61,965	68,801	70,235	9,765	80,000	88%	44%
Talladega Division (231K ac)	43,024	48,833	49,751	10,249	60,000	83%	22%
Tuskegee (11K ac)	2,129	2,767	2,811	1,189	4,000	70%	26%

* Acreage based upon LRMP (Forest Plan)

** Based upon total NFsAL forest acreage of 670,000 acres

Note in previous 2022-2023 BMER there was an error in the calculation of the longleaf composition of total forested landscape.

Longleaf habitat improvements through overstory silvicultural treatments totaled 1,211 acres in 2024 and 1,812 acres in 2025, an increase from the prior BMER period. Land acquisitions added 88 acres in 2024. Prescribed burning occurred on about 126,916 acres in 2024 and 77,402 acres in 2025, totaling 76,623 fewer acres than 2022–2023 but still within the general range of the 2004 Forest Plan. These burns benefited upland fire-adapted habitats supporting species such as RCW, Northern bobwhite, Indigo snake, Gopher tortoise, and multiple rare plant communities. Continued declines in annual burn acres and reduced growing-season burning may increase hardwood encroachment risks.

No mechanical fuels treatments were reported. Burns under Stevens Agreements totaled 1,897 acres in FY 2024 and 713.5 acres in FY 2025 on private lands within ten miles of National Forest boundaries. RCW populations have increased across all districts since 2013, with new, stable groups established on Tuskegee in 2024. Frequent Northern bobwhite detections on Conecuh indicate open-woodland habitat conditions are improving at landscape scales.

Challenges persist, including invasive species competition and hardwood encroachment in thinned woodlands, which cannot be effectively controlled by fire alone. Mature hardwoods remain abundant, especially in riparian areas across all districts. The mature hardwood complex near the eastern Sipsey Wilderness provides important habitat for a monitored Cerulean warbler population.

Timber harvests continue to provide needed successional diversity, but early-successional habitat (0–10 years) remains well below desired conditions at only 0.47% of total acreage in 2025. Mid-successional habitat occurs on about 31% of the landscape and late-successional on about 68%.

Aquatic Habitat

Cooperative monitoring with the Southern Research Station's Center for Aquatic Technology Transfer, Alabama Power Company, and NFsAL continued during this period. In 2024–2025, six stream reaches (4.4 km) across three districts were surveyed for mussel community structure and habitat conditions. A total of 314 live mussels representing 11 species, including one federally threatened and three RFSS species, were collected. Mussel communities and habitat conditions were consistent with previous surveys, with no signs of degradation.

In 2025, fish sampling and an Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) assessment were completed in Bear Creek following an erosion control and aquatic passage project. In 325 meters of sampling, 41 fish from 8 species were recorded. Spot sampling for the rare Blueface darter resulted in four individuals captured, including two gravid females. The combined IBI score was 42 ("good"), matching 2023 results and indicating successful fish passage following barrier removal. Additional fish and habitat surveys were conducted at spring- and cave-associated reaches on Bankhead, including Blowing Springs Run (where flame chubs were observed), Elam Creek, and Smith Hollow Cave Spring Run.

Figure 4. Blueface Darters captured in Bear Creek, Bankhead Ranger District, 04/12/2023. Photo credit: Dylan Shaw (APCO).

In 2024, fish and habitat monitoring was completed at three Oakmulgee stream reaches. Little Pryor Creek (460 m) produced 290 fish from 20 species; historical samples (1985, 2001) show stable communities over time. Little Oakmulgee Creek (200 m) produced 100 fish from 16 species, consistent with past surveys (1974–2018). South Sandy Creek (175 m) produced 91 fish from 20 species, also stable compared to historical collections (1954–1994). Upstream watershed analysis documented 435 management activities over 285 km² from 1973–2024, with hazardous fuels treatments being most extensive; road densities ranged from 0.58–2.01 km/km².

In 2025, fish monitoring was conducted in an unnamed tributary of Shoal Creek at FSR 548, where perched culverts were replaced with bottomless arches in 2024. Surveys documented 100 fish from seven species, with one additional species detected compared to 2019. A Dixie Chub population was recorded upstream—the first known record for the Shoal Creek District and upper Coosa drainage. Many female Coosa Darters, Blacknose Dace, and Dixie Chubs were gravid. Increased species richness upstream indicates successful aquatic organism passage. Despite heavy rainfall events in early 2025, no damage occurred at the new crossing structures, demonstrating their effectiveness in handling high flows and bedload movement.

Forest Health Threats

Acidic Deposition, Ozone and Fine Particulate Matter

Acidic deposition of nitrogen and sulfur has declined significantly across Alabama national forests from 2000–2024, with the greatest reductions in northern units. Deposition rates have remained stable since 2017. Fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and ozone, which can affect vegetation, ecosystems, and water chemistry, were monitored from 2015–2025. Following the 2024 EPA update lowering the annual PM2.5 standard, both PM2.5 and ozone concentrations continued downward trends within the 100 km and 300 km airsheds. No NAAQS exceedances or non-attainment counties were identified. No correlation was observed between annual burned acres and ambient PM2.5 levels.

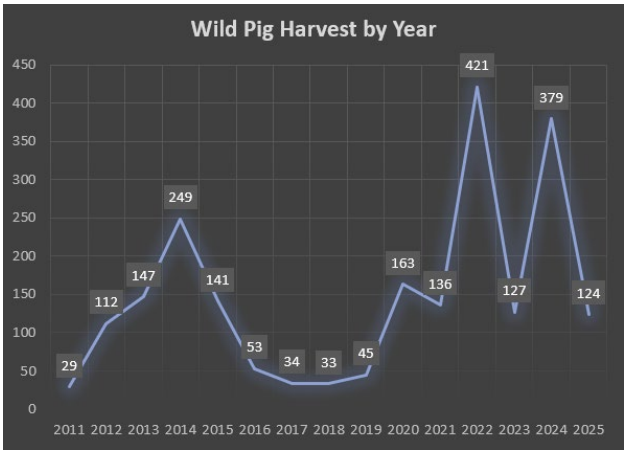


Figure 5. Bankhead feral pig removal trends since 2011.

Non-Native Invasive Species

Feral pig infestations remain significant on Bankhead and Oakmulgee, with smaller populations on Tuskegee and Shoal Creek. Trapping continues in partnership with USDA APHIS and Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Bankhead expanded control into the Sipsey Wilderness in 2022. In FY 2024, 379 pigs were removed (including 20 sounders, 11 in the Wilderness); in 2025, 124 pigs were removed (9 sounders, 3 in Wilderness). APHIS removed 244 pigs from Oakmulgee in 2024 and 197 in 2025. Despite progress, pig damage continues in sensitive habitats such as glades and wetlands.

Invasive plant species—including bicolor lespedeza, cogongrass, and Chinese privet—continue to affect

early-seral communities, bottomlands, and roadsides. Kudzu, cogongrass, mimosa, and bicolor lespedeza remain priority pests depending on habitat type. Active treatment is ongoing, but many infestations remain, and Early Detection–Rapid Response efforts are still needed. In 2024, NFsAL treated 906 acres of invasive plants, and 306 acres in 2025 using selective herbicides.

Southern Pine Beetle and Hemlock Wooly Adelgid

Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) remains the most significant forest pest in the southern U.S. County-level hazard maps are used to identify areas at risk (Appendix F). In FY 2024, SPB activity occurred on Bankhead, Talladega, Shoal Creek, and Oakmulgee, with 2,087 spots affecting an estimated 14,171 acres; 22 counties and three NFsAL districts were in outbreak status. Bankhead experienced the highest impacts. In 2025, Alabama again had the region's highest SPB activity, but only two counties were in outbreak status, and no Forest Service districts met outbreak criteria. On NFsAL, 103 spots affecting about 11 acres were detected.

Limited SPB treatments during the BMER period have left thousands of acres of dead pines requiring assessment, regeneration, and hazard mitigation. Proposed forest management activities aim to improve forest health and resilience by increasing stand vigor, replacing off-site or invasive species with appropriate natives, and reducing insect and disease vulnerability. Thinning overstocked stands will help reduce SPB-related mortality and slow the spread of root diseases.

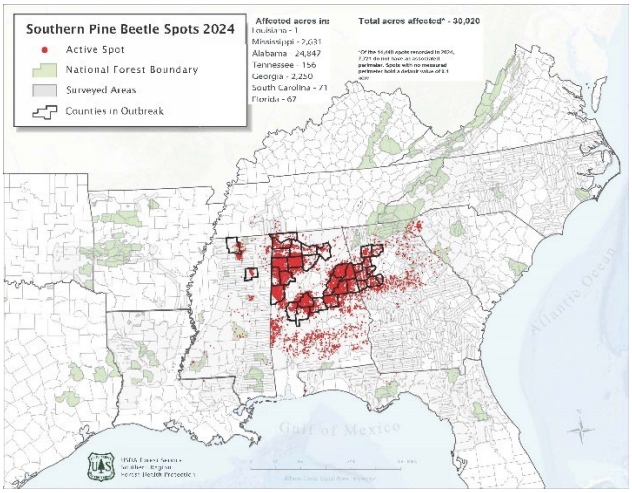


Figure 6. Southern Pine Beetle Spots 2024, National Forests in Alabama, Talladega and Shoal Creek Ranger Districts. Credit: Jim Meeker.

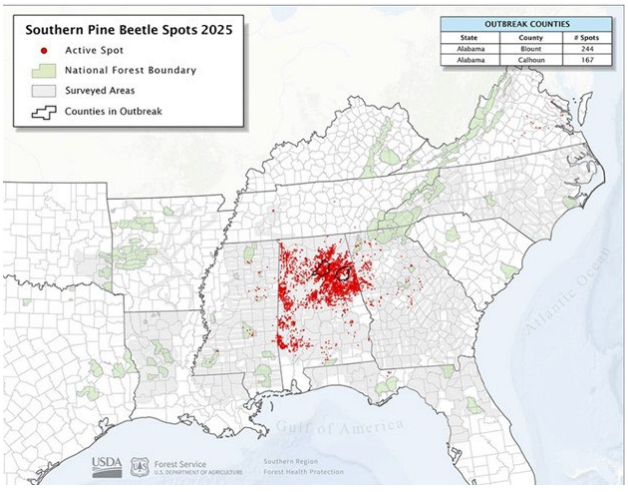


Figure 7. Southern Pine Beetle Spots 2025, National Forests in Alabama, Talladega and Shoal Creek Ranger Districts. Credit: Jim Meeker.

Forest conditions favorable to southern pine beetles remain widespread on NFsAL. While off-site loblolly pine continues to be targeted for conversion to more appropriate species such as longleaf, many stands still exhibit high susceptibility, and the 2023–2024 outbreaks included impacts to young shortleaf pine and mixed stands. Hemlock woolly adelgid monitoring continues twice annually at six Bankhead sites, with no detections to date.

Watersheds, Riparian Areas, Wetlands, Floodplains, and Soils

During 2024–2025, volunteer water quality monitoring declined, with only five sites sampled on the Tuskegee, Bankhead, and Talladega Districts. Partners measured bacteriological and water chemistry conditions; naturally low alkalinity was expected. Three sites on Tuskegee and Bankhead showed elevated levels of *E. coli* during several sampling events, and the cause is unknown and should continue to be monitored. Data and atypical values can be viewed here: Alabama Water Watch (auburn.edu).

No new stream segments within the national forests were added to the state's impaired-waters list. Two soil and water improvement projects were completed on Bankhead in 2024 to reduce stream sedimentation caused by illegal off-road vehicle use, and monitoring showed the treatments were effective. No new watershed restoration plans were started, and no Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring occurred.

Figure 8. Bear Creek Erosion Control Project before and after treatment. Credit John Moran

With hydrology and soil positions vacant, there is a need to ensure proper review of soil, hydrology, floodplain, wetland, watershed, and riparian resources during project planning and environmental analysis, verify that Forest Plan standards are being applied, and resume BMP monitoring.

Recommendations

Expand monitoring of rare communities and species by agency personnel and partners. This will require filling critical vacancies, including biologists and physical scientists and recruiting and training certified prescriptionists. Continue prescribed burning and protection of sensitive sites. Continue active herbicide and feral pig control efforts.

Update Table 2.7 RCW Population Objectives in the Forest Plan to include FWS De-listing population goals as shown in this BMER (Table 2).

Collect data on and assess vegetation structure, composition, and age class distribution to determine if conditions are within desired range of variability, especially of woodland types. Ensure FSVeg data is accurate and timely to reflect stand conditions. Track and assess season of burn and fire return interval.

Botanist or Ecologist is needed to ensure inventory, monitoring and management of rare communities and rare species are conducted and considered during project planning, especially since the NFsAL represents one of the most diverse states and forests in the nation.

Physical scientists (hydrologist/soil scientist) are needed for project planning and analysis and to ensure projects are in alignment with Executive Orders and Forest Plan standards and guidelines, in addition to Best Management Practices monitoring, Watershed Restoration Action Plans, Watershed Condition Framework and related soil and water programs.

Continue precommercial and commercial thinning pine stands and conversion of off-site lobllolly pine stands to longleaf to reduce the impacts from Southern Pine Beetle. Address standing dead timber stands resulting from SPB outbreak. Need assessment and treatments (artificial regeneration) to mitigate future SPB infestations.

Explore opportunities with the University of Alabama to continue the TEUI project on another District if funding allows.

Inquire with NRCS if any mapping updates have been completed on the Forests.

Continue and expand volunteer water monitoring in consideration of atypical values associated with E. Coli.

Develop Watershed Restoration Action Plans and partnerships to identify needs and secure funding opportunities, such as the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Healthy Forests Initiative.

New projects need to consider management of riparian areas as per Forest Plan direction.

Effects of Management Activities to Protect, Maintain, or Restore Select Populations

Summary

The Forest Plan directs us to substantially contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species and provide for the conservation of Forest Service sensitive species. The Forest Plan provides both short and long-term recovery goals for the red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) from the Revised Recovery Plan for the RCW. The NFsAL use twelve management indicator species (MIS) to monitor management effects on wildlife and availability of key terrestrial habitats.

Non-game bird MIS continue to be monitored through the Southern National Forests' Landbird Conservation Strategy, with roughly 300 survey points assessed annually. Results from this on-going effort are here. Local trends show stable riparian songbird habitats and increasing early-seral and herbaceous understory conditions. Red-cockaded woodpecker populations continue to rise. Bat monitoring on Bankhead shows declines in cave-associated species following the spread of white-nose syndrome. Indigo snake numbers on Conecuh continue to improve through the ongoing repatriation partnership. Eastern wild turkey populations continue to decline region-wide, with statewide research underway. Statewide turkey research projects are here. Game species harvest data, including deer, turkey, and bobwhite, are provided by the Alabama Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, and hunting demand on NFsAL remains high. County level information on white-tailed deer harvest is here.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 4. How well are key terrestrial habitat attributes being provided?
- MQ 7. What are the status and trends of federally listed species and species with viability

concerns on the forest?

- MQ 8. What are the trends for demand species and their use?

Key Terrestrial Habitats

The Forest Plan identifies twelve bird and game species as management indicator species. Monitoring occurs each year through breeding bird surveys and game-harvest information, though the total number of survey points declined during this period due to reduced budgets, vacancies, and shifting priorities.

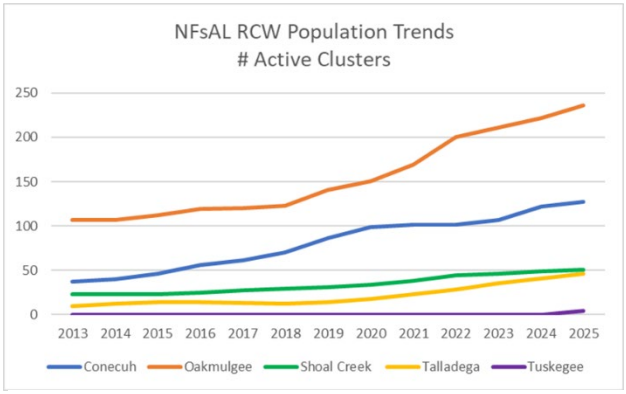


Figure 9. NFsAL RCW Population Trends and Number of Active Clusters

Red-cockaded woodpecker numbers increased from 399 active clusters in 2023 to 434 in 2024 and 464 in 2025. This steady growth indicates the continued availability of mature, open pine forests with little hardwood midstory and strong herbaceous understory—habitats that are uncommon on most private lands and support many rare species.

Figure 10. RCW repatriated to Tuskegee National Forest

Most indicator bird species remained relatively stable across the NFsAL. Northern bobwhite detections on Conecuh increased, reflecting open, fire-maintained habitat conditions. Other species also showed consistent detections: Hooded warbler and Prairie warbler on Oakmulgee; Acadian flycatcher and Hooded warbler on Bankhead; and Brown-headed nuthatch on Tuskegee. Overall bird species richness remains high, suggesting diverse and healthy habitat conditions.

However, despite stable trends in some key habitats, forest inventory data and environmental analysis indicate that early-successional forest remains limited and is not being restored at the rate outlined in the Forest Plan. Riparian early-successional habitats are rarely created through timber harvests even though the plan includes this objective. Timber harvest levels remain below Forest Plan expectations, limiting early-successional habitat in some areas

Status and Trends of Listed Species and Species with Viability Concerns

Not all federally listed or sensitive species are monitored each year due to limited capacity, but several priority species receive intensive monitoring. Red-cockaded woodpeckers continued to increase across all occupied areas, reaching 434 active clusters in 2024 and 464 in 2025.

The Conecuh National Forest and Blackwater State Forest population reached 250 potential breeding groups in 2024, meeting its recovery goal decades earlier than projected. In 2024, five red-cockaded woodpecker pairs were moved from Apalachicola National Forest to newly prepared habitat on Tuskegee. Four active clusters and seven fledglings were documented in 2025, an unusually high first-year retention rate. A second translocation took place in late 2025.

Indigo snake restoration continued on Conecuh, with 85 snakes released during 2024–2025. A national Forest Service project is expanding capacity to support future releases.

Winter surveys at Nellie Pond documented ten gopher frog egg masses, confirming continued breeding at one of the few known sites. Additional cave surveys found tricolored bats on both Conecuh and Bankhead forests, while other federally listed bat species were not detected, reflecting continued declines caused by white-nose syndrome. A video captured by Fish Biologist John Moran indicates breeding on Conecuh.

Figure 11. Rush darter collected on Bankhead, 2/23/2024

A long-term effort to track wintering Golden Eagles continued through 2024. Since 2013, twenty-three birds have been fitted with transmitters, confirming winter distribution, habitat use, and migration routes. Eastern spotted skunk was detected at new sites on Bankhead, confirming the species still persists there. A herpetofauna study documented four-toed salamanders on Bankhead, including a new county record.

Aquatic surveys documented sixteen bluenose shiners at twenty-seven sites on Conecuh and confirmed ongoing presence of blueface darters in multiple Bankhead streams. Rush darter spawning sites on Bankhead were revisited in 2024 and 2025, and the endangered species continued to use known sites with no observed habitat decline.

Figure 12. Forest Service Partners release indigo snakes on Conecuh National Forest.

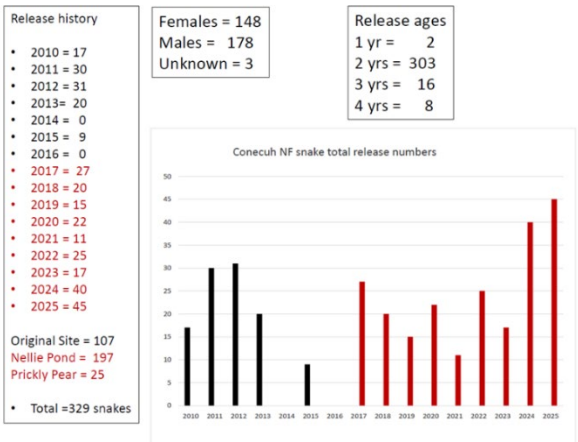


Figure 13. Total Number of Eastern Indigo Snakes Released on the Conecuh National Forest.

Trends for Demand Species

White-tailed deer harvests have remained stable, with several high-scoring bucks taken annually, especially on Black Warrior WMA. Talladega National Forest (all units) and Oakmulgee WMA continue to show the highest overall harvests, reflecting strong hunter participation. In 2023–2024, NFsAL hunters harvested 1,365 deer, and 1,346 in 2024–2025. Unantlered harvest ratios were highest on Conecuh and its WMAs in 2025. Chronic Wasting Disease, first detected in Alabama in 2022, has resulted in 21 positive cases in Lauderdale and Colbert counties, with no detections on NFsAL lands.

Wild turkey numbers on NFsAL continue to reflect statewide declines linked to low hen survival and recruitment. Regulation changes made with ADCNR in 2022 aimed to improve early-season protection. Harvest totaled 458 birds in 2023–2024 and 308 in 2024–2025, with Choccolocco WMA and Talladega NF producing the highest harvests both years.

Bobwhite detections remain relatively high on Conecuh but low elsewhere, and no harvest data were reported. Thirteen Free Use botanical permits were issued in 2024–2025, mainly for taxonomic and genetic research.

Recommendations

Consider incorporating snag data collection during common stand exams to indicate habitat availability for snag dependent species and listed bats.

Develop partnerships and seek funds to monitor federally listed and Regional Forester's Sensitive Species, including species of greatest conservation need identified in the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan, including plants.

Develop partnerships and seek funds to monitor management indicator species in light of reduction in bird point count surveys and monitoring. Monitor citizen science information, including eBird data.

See Table 15 for a summary of the recommendations, progress toward land management plan desired conditions and objectives, and recommended actions/next steps.

Visitor Use, Satisfaction, and Progress on Recreation Objectives

Summary

The NFsAL were able to keep all areas open to the public during the FY24 and FY25 monitoring periods. This challenge was no small feat with decreased funding and staffing. In conjunction with this issue was the rising cost of services and operational materials and supplies. To bridge the gap, the NFsAL continued to seek alternative funding sources, monitor fee compliance and build partnerships and volunteers to assist with providing services. Even with these efforts, the Forest continued to battle the ever-increasing backlog of deferred maintenance at recreational sites.

The NFsAL conducted National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) surveys during FY24. This survey is completed once every 5 years. This survey system has 14 metrics that are assessed in developed facilities, access, services, and safety.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 9. Are high quality, nature-based recreation experiences being provided and what are the trends?
- MQ 10. What are the status and trends of recreation use impacts on the environment?
- MQ 11. What is the status and trend of wilderness character?
- MQ 12. What are the status and trends of Wild and Scenic River conditions?
- MQ 13. Are the scenery and recreation settings changing and why?

Recreation

Visitor satisfaction in FY 2024 declined by about 7% from FY 2019, reflecting ongoing challenges in providing high-quality recreation experiences. Forest visits decreased by 16%, a return to pre-COVID-19 use levels. Hunting, hiking/walking, and driving for pleasure remained the top activities, increasing from 49% of all primary activities in FY 2019 to 61% in FY 2024, with gains in hunting and hiking/walking and declines in pleasure driving.

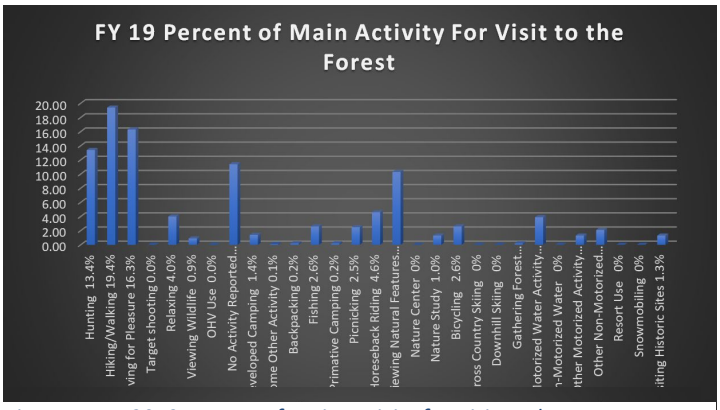


Figure 14. FY2019 Percent of Main Activity for Visit to the Forest

FY 2024 demographics showed visitors were 83.4% male and 16.6% female, with 90.3% White and 8.4% Hispanic/Latino. In FY 2019, the gender balance was 70.1% male and 29.9% female, and the Hispanic/Latino share was lower.

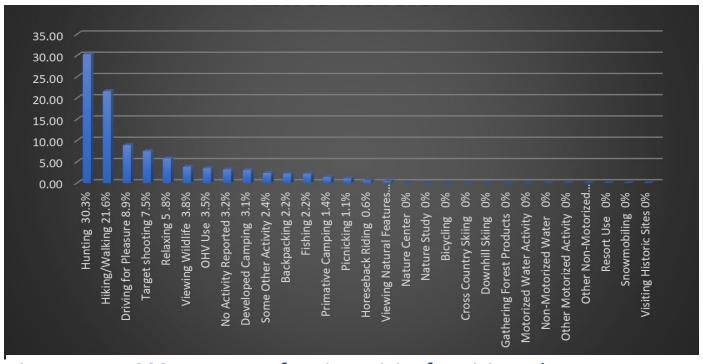


Figure 15. FY2024 Percent of Main Activity for Visit to the Forest

Law Enforcement Investigation Reporting System (LEIRS) data indicated fewer incidents and violations compared to FY 2022–2023, consistent with reduced visitor use and possibly influenced by LEI staffing vacancies. Common violations remained failure to pay fees, unauthorized motor vehicle use, and state hunting/fishing violations.

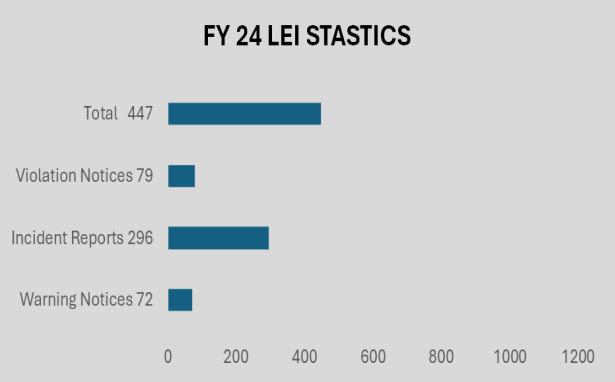


Figure 16. FY2025 LEI Statics for National Forests in Alabama

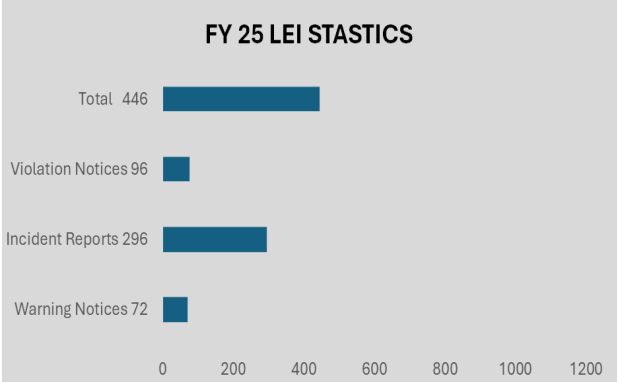


Figure 17. FY2025 LEI Statics for National Forests in Alabama

Recreation fee revenue decreased by about 3%, aligning with reduced use. Event permits increased by 28%, rising from 29 to 37. Several projects were completed during the monitoring period, including the FY 2024 NVUM survey, recreation site improvements across all districts, resurfacing at Open Pond, beach upgrades at Payne Lake, and partnership-supported work such as OHV barrier installation, trail maintenance, and construction of a bridge and fishing pier on the Pinhoti Trail. Routine maintenance and youth fishing events also supported recreation across the Forest.

Wilderness

Sipsey Wilderness continues to show strong progress in reducing haze on its most impaired days while maintaining or improving visibility on the clearest days. From 1993 to 2024, visual range on the haziest days increased from 15.3 kilometers to 74.15 kilometers, reflecting long-term improvements driven primarily by regional reductions in sulfur dioxide emissions. These reductions have steadily decreased lightscattering particles, resulting in clearer views and better air quality. Figures 17 and 18 provide the highest confidence data for this reporting period.

Results from Wilderness Character Monitoring and Wild and Scenic River Condition assessments indicate that no authorizations for motorized or mechanical transport were issued in the Sipsey, Cheaha, or Dugger Mountain Wilderness Areas. Conditions and trends remained stable throughout the FY24–FY25 monitoring period.

Figure 18. Air monitoring equipment is replaced on the Sipsey Wilderness, a Federal Class I area on the Bankhead National Forest in Alabama. Forest Service photo by Jacob Deal

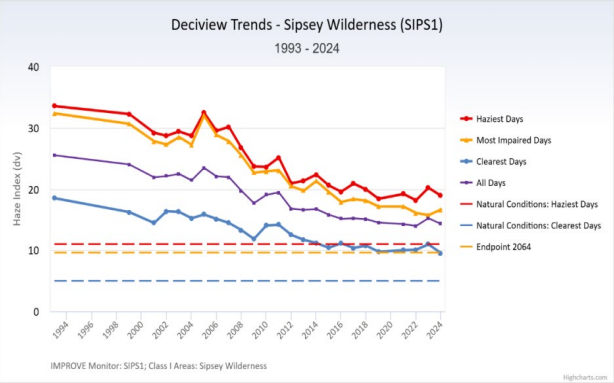


Figure 6. Deciview Trends for Sipsey Wilderness

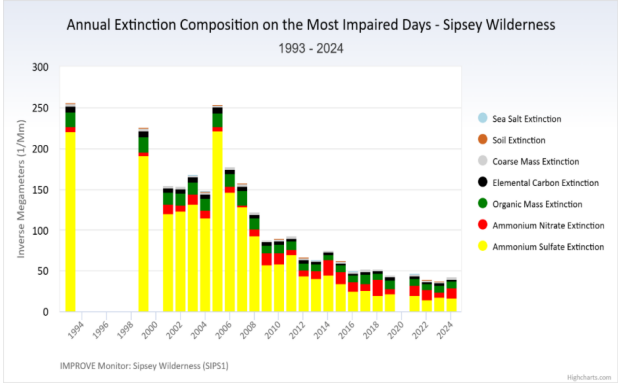


Figure 7. Annual Extinction Composition on the Most Impaired Days

The Sipsey Wilderness has had 3 fires in its extent in the last 6 years. The two larger fires were 997 acres on the Cranal Road and 199 on the Bunyan Hill, otherwise minimal acres on the 3rd multistart fire on the west side. The Dugger Wilderness has had 7 fires in its extent over the last 6 years. The largest of which was the Dry Branch Fire in 2024, otherwise nothing bigger than 12 acres. Cheaha Wilderness has had 5 fires in its extent over 6 years. Duck Nest and Fall branch are within the vicinity of Mount Cheaha. Cave Creek and Silent are in the middle of the wilderness and Odum is on the south end.

Recommendations

The NFsAL should continue strengthening staffing levels to support future recreation management needs and consider expanding online payment options, such as Recreation.gov and scan-and-pay systems, to improve workload efficiency. Recreation Program Managers should regularly coordinate with Public Affairs to keep website information current, and kiosk signage should be reviewed to ensure accuracy and consistency. Forest Protection Officers should maintain close coordination with Law Enforcement Officers to address illegal activities, with emphasis on fee compliance and reducing unauthorized OHV use in resource-sensitive areas.

Climate Change and Other Stressors

Summary

The Forest Service stewards many of our nation's most treasured landscapes. Impacts from climate change, extreme weather, and other disturbances—along with changing human demands—challenge our ability to ensure that ecosystems are healthy, resilient, and more adaptable to changing conditions.

This monitoring category is comprised of three questions in response to the 2012 Planning Rule about how climate variability has changed, the influence of climate change on the plan area, and the effects of national forests on climate change. This monitoring is conducted and reported by the Southern Region

as part of the broad-scale monitoring requirements in the 2012 Planning Rule. The 2020 "Broad-Scale Climate Change Monitoring Evaluation Report for the Southern Region" is here.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 20. How has climate variability changed and how is it projected to change across the region?
- MQ 21. How is climate variability and change influencing the ecological, social, and economic conditions and contributions provided by plans areas in the region?
- MQ 22. What effects do national forests in the region have on a changing climate?

There has been no new monitoring since the last regional Broad-Scale monitoring report. For more information, see the previous BMER or the "Broadscale-Scale Climate Change Monitoring Evaluation Report for the Southern Region." For the NFsAL for this period there are no updates. In 2025, Executive Order 14008 was rescinded in its entirety through Executive Order 14148 terminating the Justice 40 Initiative, Environmental Justice Scorecard and Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool.

Recommendations

In the short-term, there is no need for change in the NFsAL Forest Plan direction, management activities or monitoring arising from this evaluation. The required monitoring questions, and associated indicators, should be added to the Forest Plan.

See Table 15 for a summary of the recommendations and progress.

Progress Toward Meeting Forest Plan and Objectives

Summary

The Forest Plan objectives and standards provide direction to enable the NFsAL to meet the goals of maintaining and improving vegetation management using silvicultural practices such as timber harvesting, site preparation, timber stand improvement, tree planting, and prescribed fire that are essential for reaching the desired ecological conditions. The Forest Plan Standards also provide guidance to administer a transportation system, minerals, and lands for multiple use objectives.

In 2015, the NFsAL entered the second decade of the Forest Plan. The SPECTRUM model, which was used to help determine allowable sale quantity (ASQ) during the first and second decade of the Forest Plan, projected outputs of timber production around 155 million cubic feet in the second period.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 17. How do actual outputs and services compare with projected?

- MQ 19. Are Forest Plan objectives and standards being applied and accomplishing their intended purpose?

Timber, Vegetation and Prescribed Fire Activity

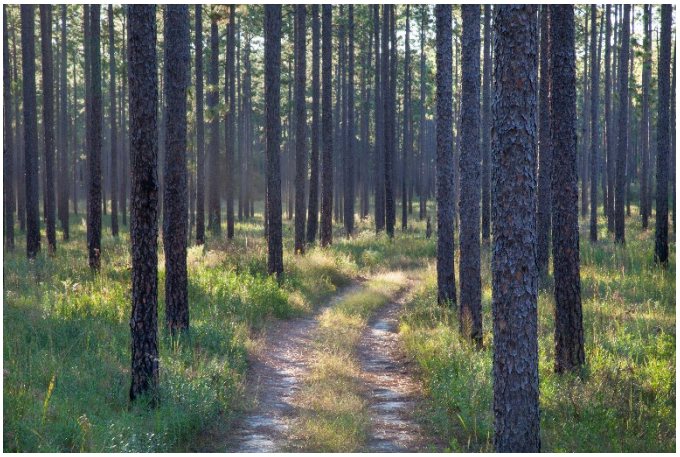


Figure 8. Longleaf Pine Plantation on the Conecuh National Forest. Forest Service licensed photo by Beth Maynor Young

Monitoring in FY 2024–2025 shows mixed activity levels in vegetation management and prescribed fire compared to FY 2022–2023. Although total acres treated declined (133,471 acres in FY 2024 and 89,641 acres in FY 2025), several activities—such as midstory treatments, wildlife opening mowing, release treatments, and feral hog control—showed localized increases, reflecting targeted use of limited resources. In contrast, landscape-scale work, especially prescribed burning, decreased significantly due to extended unfavorable weather, limited burn windows, budget and national administrative changes, dropping from 145,629 acres in FY 2022 to 77,402 acres in FY 2025. Despite this reduction, prescribed fire accomplishments remained within the Forest Plan's projected output range for fuel reduction. Mechanical thinning, site prep, and regeneration harvests showed similar declines. Table 4 summarizes the acres treated by activity and demonstrates the shift in emphasis during FY 2024–FY 2025 toward more targeted vegetation management and habitat maintenance activities, with reduced emphasis on broadscale fuels treatments and silviculture programs.

Table 4. Forest-wide Acres of Vegetation Management Treatments for the NFsAL.

Activity	Acres By Fiscal Year			
	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Thinning	3,859	2,298	970	449
Midstory	460	1,209	16	825
Burning	145,629	135,312	126,916	77,402
NNIS Plants	1,385	992	993	305
NNIS Pigs	13,032	24,946	450	7,815
Tree Planting	930	452	252	356
Mowing – W/L opening maintenance	322	134	325	512
Site preparation	838	515	1,048	305
Timber Harvest – Regeneration	1,172	1,626	1,812	775
Release	2,005	666	479	897
Pre-commercial thinning	0	0	210	0
Total	**169,632**	**168,150**	**133,471**	**89,641**

Timber outputs for final harvest (regeneration) remain well below projected levels for both volume and acres in the second 10-year period. Although total volume sold fluctuated over the last five years, cumulative volume reached only 45.6% of the projection. Thinning acres, however, exceeded projections by 149%, driven by ecological needs such as SPB suppression, RCW habitat management, longleaf restoration, and woodland/savanna restoration. Table 5 presents the second period's actual outputs recorded in the database of record compared to Forest Plan projections.

Table 5. Forest Plan Projected Timber Volumes and Harvested Acres for the Second 10-years Compared to Actual Timber Volumes Sold

	FY2015-2023	FY 2024	FY2025	Projected (2^{nd} 10-year Period)	Total	% change of Projected
Timber Volume Sold (Cubic Feet)	63,638,194	2,623,595	4,768,489	155,800,000	71,030,278	-45.6
Thinnings (Acres)	26,081	970	449	18,425	27,500	149.3
Final Harvest (Acres)	10,302	1,812	775	31,775	12,889	-40.6

Project Environmental Analyses Implementation

Project Activity Purposes

During FY 2024 and 2025, a total of 31 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decisions were signed. These decisions collectively resulted in the accomplishment of 52 project activity purposes. The purposes most frequently addressed were associated with special use management (13), vegetation management excluding forest products and inclusive of fuels management (9), wildlife, fish, and rare plant management (7), and timber product activities (6).

Overall, the number of project activity purposes increased by 55% in FY 2025 compared to the prior fiscal year. Despite this increase in activity purposes, the total number of NEPA decisions issued during the most recent reporting period remained constant, reflecting no change from the previous cycle. This trend is illustrated in Figure 20. NEPA Decisions: Views - Tableau Server (usda.gov)

During the monitoring period, the Forest Service's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulation at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 220 was formally rescinded. As of July 3, 2025, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) implemented a new interim NEPA regulation at 7 CFR part 1b, which consolidates and replaces agency-specific NEPA rules, including the former 36 CFR 220.

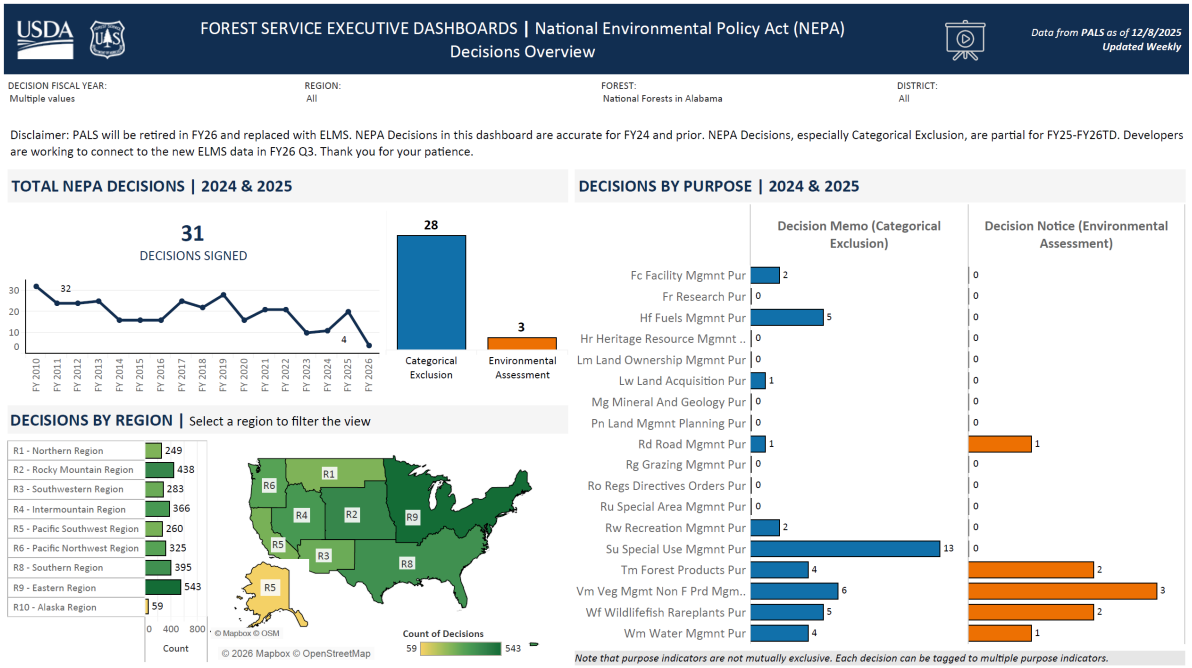


Figure 9. National Forests in Alabama NEPA Decision for FY2024 and FY2025.

Lands and Special Uses

During FY 2024–2025, special use administration activity increased significantly, reflecting strong demand for access to NFS lands and infrastructure. In FY 2024, the Forest issued eight land use permits and nine recreation permits, generating $29,446 in total fees. Activity expanded in FY 2025, with 21 land use permits and 28 recreation permits issued, producing $88,681 in fees. The rise in permits and revenue across both years indicates growing engagement from partners, utilities, private individuals, and recreation providers, underscoring the program's importance in supporting public access, services, and compliance.

Landline Maintenance

Landline maintenance activity increased notably during FY 2024–2025. No work occurred in FY 2024, but maintenance resumed in FY 2025, with 18.5 miles completed on Bankhead, 5.5 miles on Oakmulgee, and 12 miles across the Talladega and Shoal Creek Districts. This work improved boundary accuracy and supported land ownership administration.

Although the landline program is designed for an 8-year rotation, reduced funding and staffing have extended the cycle to about 35 years. As a result, only 40–70 miles are maintained annually across an estimated 2,000 miles of boundary, contributing to a growing maintenance backlog and increased long-term risks to boundary defensibility.

Road Maintenance

Over the past four fiscal years, road maintenance accomplishments have declined across most maintenance levels. This downward trend is primarily driven by increased deferred maintenance needs, rising annual maintenance costs, reduced availability of funding, and inflationary pressures on materials, supplies, and contracted services. These combined factors have limited the number of road miles that could be maintained each year and contributed to year-to-year variability in completed mileage.

From 2022 to 2025, total miles maintained decreased from 564.3 miles to 488.9 miles, with the most significant reductions occurring in maintenance levels 2, 3, and 4. Although FY 2023 showed a temporary increase in output, overall accomplishments have trended downward as cost, and resource constraints have increased.

Table 6. Road Maintenance

Fiscal Year	Miles of Road Maintenance by Maintenance Level				Total Miles
	2	3	4	5	
2022	257.3	205.0	102.0	0.0	564.3
2023	256.5	283.4	126.9	0.8	667.6
2024	242.3	195.2	97.6	0.1	535.2
2025	226.7	176.8	85.4	0.0	488.9

Recommendations

Based on these results, we are considering the following possible changes:

MQ17 *Fire Activities*
Strengthening planning pipelines, so units are ready when funding and weather conditions align. Additionally, improving annual monitoring and feedback loops will support adaptive management and more effective reprioritization. Strengthening cross-unit coordination and using shared-stewardship burn crews will expand implementation capability.

Regeneration Harvest
Final harvest projections should be reassessed to better match current ecological priorities and operational capacity. Future targets may need adjustment to reflect the ongoing emphasis on thinning and restoration treatments. It is also important to evaluate the constraints affecting regeneration harvest outputs to determine whether plan objectives, workforce capacity, or market conditions need updating.

NNIS Plants
Expanding treatment capacity through partnerships and cooperative agreements will help increase impact. Enhancing mapping and early-detection monitoring will improve prioritization of limited resources. Stabilizing funding is also important to reduce year-to-year variability in treatment accomplishments.

Thinning

Increased funding and staffing focus is needed. Reinforcing the silviculture planning pipeline will help ensure units identified in NEPA decisions are ready for implementation. Using multi-year contracting where possible will also help stabilize output and reduce variability.

Landline Maintenance

Establish annual landline maintenance targets for each ranger district. Strengthening program capacity through stable funding, staffing solutions, and the use of partnerships or contracted support would help move the program toward its goal. Prioritizing high-risk or high-use boundary segments would further maximize program effectiveness.

Road Maintenance

Future efforts should focus on prioritizing critical road corridors, strengthening planning for deferred maintenance, and pursuing additional funding sources to offset rising costs. Enhancing cost-efficiency through optimized scheduling, material alternatives, and strategic contracting can help stretch limited resources further. Aligning annual maintenance targets with realistic funding levels will support more achievable planning, while improved tracking of costs, conditions, and productivity will provide clearer insight for decision-making and help stabilize accomplishments over time.

MQ19 Continue Forest Plan Revision analysis process to reconsider the lands available for leasing as well as the stipulations that would apply.

See Table 15 for a summary of the recommendations, progress toward land management plan desired conditions and objectives, and recommended actions.

Effects of Management Systems Sustainability

Summary

The Forest Plan outlines the priority of restoring and maintaining native longleaf forest ecosystems, including hardwood, hardwood-pine, pine (shortleaf and longleaf), and mountain longleaf pine forest communities within the Alabama region. These objectives are pursued through the implementation of intensive silvicultural practices, including prescribed burning, mechanical and chemical vegetation management, and the application of even-aged, two-aged, and uneven-aged forest management methods.

Each unit reported field surveys for 1st and 3rd survival and stocking exams for plantations planted for FY 2023 and FY 2025. Both years met Forest Plan standards but saw a downward shift compared to previous monitoring period.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 18. Are silvicultural requirements of the Forest Plan met?

Vegetation Management – Regeneration

Vegetation management activities continue to follow Forest Plan standards for harvest unit size and regeneration requirements, with regeneration certified within five years based on post-harvest stocking surveys documented in FACTS. Recommended planting density remains 8-by-8-foot spacing, or about 681 trees per acre, adjusted as needed for site conditions.

Seedling orders for FY 2022–2023 emphasized longleaf and shortleaf pine restoration, totaling 740,969 seedlings. Procurement decreased in FY 2024–2025 to 392,256 seedlings but maintained a strong focus on longleaf pine. Longleaf remains the primary species ordered across both periods, reflecting the Forest's long-term objective to restore longleaf pine ecosystem.

Table 7. Planned Tree Planting Seedlings Ordered

Planned Tree Planting Seedlings Ordered					
	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	**Total**
Longleaf Seedlings	188,756	390,213	Null	358,206	937,175
Shortleaf Seedlings	162,000	0	Null	34,050	196,050
Grand Total	**350,756**	**390,213**	**Null**	**392,256**	**1,133,225**

Adequate Stocking of Desirable Species

First- and third-year seedling survival exceeded Forest Plan requirements in 2022–2023, with first-year survival ranging from 91.5–98.1% and third-year survival from 83.2–92.1%. Minimum stocking thresholds were consistently met.

Survival declined in 2024–2025. First-year survival dropped to 87.0% in 2024 and 78.5% in 2025, while third-year survival fell more sharply, reaching 47.3% in 2024 and improving to 66.9% in 2025. Longleaf pine showed particularly reduced third-year performance. Although most first-year results remained above minimum requirements, overall regeneration success was lower and more variable than in the previous period, indicating the need for closer evaluation of site conditions and management actions.

Table 8. First Year Stocking & Survival Reports (2024)

Species	Total Acres Planted	Avg Trees Per Acre Planted	Survival Percent	Minimum Survival Percent by Species (Forest Plan Standard)
Shortleaf Pine	81.1	616.9	86.3	48.6
Longleaf Pine	526.5	658.9	87.1	60.7

Total	**607.6**	**653.3**	**87.0**	

Table 9. Third Year Stocking & Survival Reports (2024)

Species	Total Acres Planted	Avg Trees Per Acre Planted	Survival Percent	Minimum Survival Percent by Species (Forest Plan Standard)
Shortleaf Pine	16.0	681.0	74.6	44.0
Longleaf Pine	771.0	668.9	43.2	59.7
Total	**887.0**	**670.5**	**47.3**	

Table 10. First Year Stocking & Survival Reports (2025)

Species	Total Acres Planted	Avg Trees Per Acre Planted	Survival Percent	Minimum Survival Percent by Species (Forest Plan Standard)
Shortleaf Pine	NA	NA	NA	NA
Longleaf Pine	208.0	663.6	78.5	60.2
Total	**208.0**	**663.6**	**78.5**	

Table 11. Third Year Stocking & Survival Reports (2025)

Species	Total Acres Planted	Avg Trees Per Acre Planted	Survival Percent	Minimum Survival Percent by Species (Forest Plan Standard)
Shortleaf Pine	71.2	681.1	82.0	44.0
Longleaf Pine	502.8	640.2	64.7	62.4
Total	**574.0**	**645.2**	**66.9**	

Recommendations

MQ 18. Forest Plan amendment to FW-51 is needed to increase the harvest openings maximum size limitation to more than 80 acres to help achieve desired ecological conditions where undesirable loblolly

pine should be regenerated with desirable longleaf pine on suitable site types and soil conditions as directed by the Forest Plan.

Increase targeted silvicultural follow-up on units with early signs of stress or poor establishment. Investigate longleaf pine performance, focusing on moisture limitations, or pest activity in affected stands.

See Table 15 for a summary of the recommendations, progress toward land management plan desired conditions and objectives, and recommended actions.

Social, Economic, and Cultural Sustainability

Summary

The Forest Supervisor consults with the State Historic Preservation Office and federally recognized tribes/nations that have an interest in the NFsAL prior to a decision being made for project implementation. All historic properties and archaeological sites that are eligible for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or may suffer an adverse effect from one of our undertakings are protected per 36 CFR Part 800 – Protection of Historic Properties. This protection usually takes the form of exclusion.

The following results are drawn from the Broad-Scale Socioeconomic Monitoring Evaluation Report for the Southern Region. This report has not been updated and is unchanged from the previous BMER. New information evaluated for FY 2024-2025 includes Secure Rural School Act payments, contract obligations, and infrastructure projects and expenditures and are found in the project record.

Monitoring Questions and Key Results

- MQ 14. Are heritage sites being protected?
- MQ 23. What changes are occurring in the social, cultural, and economic conditions in the areas influenced by national forests in the region?

Cultural Resources

During FY 2024–2025, the NFsAL completed Section 106 surveys and reporting through contracts, agreements, and Forest Service staff. In FY 2024, 11,872 acres were surveyed, identifying 21 historic properties among 33 recorded sites. In FY 2025, 5,878 acres were surveyed, with 61 historic properties documented among 99 sites. Six Priority Heritage Assets were monitored, with no new PHAs added.

The Forest also continued close coordination with Tribal partners. In 2024, NFsAL and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma conducted an ancestor reburial on one Ranger District. In 2025, the Choctaw Nation, Chickasaw Nation, and NFsAL participated in ancestor reburials on two Ranger Districts.

Social, Cultural and Economic Conditions

Regional socioeconomic data is updated every five years, and no new regional report is available. Previous BMERs remain the reference for unemployment, poverty, and population trends. In 2025, Executive Order 14148 rescinded Executive Order 14008, ending the Justice40 Initiative and related tools.

Secure Rural Schools Program (SRS) payments to counties remained above the regional average, averaging $2.67 per acre in FY 2024–2025, a slight increase from the previous period. A Resource Advisory Committee continues to support project collaboration. In FY 2024, $364,778 was allocated for four projects in Winston and Lawrence counties; in FY 2025, $35,241 was allocated with no new projects.

In FY 2024, the NFsAL budget was $23.7 million, with $1.65 million obligated through 87 contract actions, including nine BIL and one IRA contracts. Ten grants and agreements and 40 modifications totaled $2.09 million. In FY 2025, the budget was $20.5 million, with $1.73 million obligated through 54 contract actions, including three BIL contracts. Twenty grants and agreements and 64 modifications totaled $1.01 million. Additional financial information is available on the website here.

GAOA Legacy Restoration Fund projects remain unchanged, with six approved projects totaling $3.1 million. Additional information on expenditures and contracting may be found here: https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/alabama/about-area.

Recommendations

The Forest should continue to strengthen engagement with Tribal and Nation Native American partners by ensuring consultation occurs for all NFsAL activities, including the submission of Environmental Analysis documents for their review. It should also continue to pursue and utilize all available funding sources to support Forest Plan goals and objectives. In addition, incorporating questions or analytical components that help assess effects on communities would improve monitoring efforts. Finally, socioeconomic indicators should be reviewed and refined, as needed, to better reflect factors that the National Forests can directly influence.

See Summary Table 15 which reflects the recommendations and progress.

Public Engagement

The NFsAL will share this report with partners, cooperators and the interested public using our mailing lists and by posting the report to our website. Our Partnership Coordinators LaToya Soto and Allison Cochran are points of contact for further information about monitoring efforts, results, and adaptive management responses. Feedback may be provided by contacting our Partnership Coordinators and by email at comments-southern-alabama@usda.gov. Additional information is available at the following links:

Monitoring plan: Forest Plan Chapter 5, Monitoring Plan

Monitoring reports: Previous Biennial Monitoring and Evaluation Reports

Table 15 – Summary of Results and Recommendations

Table 12. National Forests in Alabama monitoring questions and evaluation addressed in this report. Possible types of recommendations include changes to the land management plan or monitoring plan, changes in management activities, or recommendations for a new focused assessment.

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 1. Are rare communities being protected, maintained, and restored?	While only a small percentage of rare communities were monitored during the report timeframe, it is believed that rare communities are being maintained through active forest management and treatments reported. Lack of botanist or ecologist remains a limitation for monitoring. Staffing and budget constraints remain a challenge to adequately inventory and monitor existing and find undiscovered rare species and resources, especially since NFsAL represents one of the most diverse states/forests in the nation.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – Yes 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Expand monitoring of rare communities and occurrence records. Continue prescribed burning and protection of sensitive sites.
MQ 2. Are landscape-level and stand-level composition and structure of major forest communities within desirable ranges of variability?	Uncertain. We manage the forests to be healthy and diverse, with appropriate variability in tree species, sizes, and ages. This helps provide a stable and sustained flow of habitat conditions, recreational settings, and timber products. To achieve this, we need an understanding of the abundance and distribution of various forest types, such as oak woodland or pine. Several management objectives are tied to percentage of each type, age class distribution within type, and treatment acres for each.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – Uncertain 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 3. Are key successional stage habitats being provided?	Uncertain. Open, mature pine habitats are believed to be expanding (as evidenced by a significant increase in Red-cockaded woodpecker populations). Other successional habitats have not been restored to Plan levels. Early successional habitat remains a limiting factor on some units.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Continue prescribed burning at current levels.
MQ 4. How well are key terrestrial habitat attributes being provided?	Uncertain. See MQ 2.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – Uncertain 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No
MQ 5. What is the status and trend in aquatic habitat conditions in relationship to aquatic communities?	Uncertain for all communities or locations, however using fish IBI as an indicator for stream health and habitat conditions, the areas monitored in this period re maintaining healthy aquatic communities and habitat conditions over time with the implementation of the Forest Plan.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No
MQ 6. What are status and trends of forest health threats on the forest?	Yes. Although thinning acreages are inadequate to address SPB outbreaks. SPB risk is moderate to high on some units and was in outbreak status this period. Regeneration harvests are below Forest Plan projections. Infestations of invasive plants are believed to be decreasing through active treatment. Feral pig infestations are thought to be stable to slightly decreasing through active trapping.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – Yes 4 New Assessment Rec – No Continue aggressive herbicide and feral swine control efforts. Increase thinning and respond to SPB outbreaks. Increase restoration activities. Accelerate restoration.

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 7. What are the status and trends of federally listed species and species with viability concerns on the forest?	Aquatics - Uncertain for all communities or locations, however, the communities monitored using the NFsAL Forest Plan aquatic monitoring protocols this period, are stable and maintaining healthy populations. Red-cockaded woodpeckers are increasing significantly. Listed *Myotis* bats are believed to occur at only a fraction of their historic populations were in Alabama (due to white-nose syndrome). Indigo snakes are stable to increasing through releases. Other listed and sensitive plant and animal species are believed to be stable.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Update Forest Plan Table 2.7 to include RCW Population Objectives to include the FWS De-Listing Population Goal.
MQ 8. What are the trends for demand species and their use?	White-tailed deer are believed to be stable. Eastern wild turkeys are believed to be declining in Alabama as indicated by low female recruitment rates, however the cause is not understood.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Continue to support wild turkey research.
MQ 9. Are high quality, nature-based recreation experiences being provided and what are the trends?	Yes, recreation projects are designed to enhance and improve the recreation experience. Upward trend in special use permit request.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 10. What are the status and trends of recreation use impacts on the environment?	No, major impacts to the Forest are resource damage, soil erosion, and impacts to visitor safety. User-made trails that are not designed properly and create potential confusion among visitors.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Forest staff qualified as Forest Protection Officers should maintain close coordination with Law Enforcement Officers to improve awareness of illegal activities occurring on the Forest. Key priorities should include enforcing fee compliance and assisting with addressing illegal OHV use, particularly in areas where resource and watershed impacts are occurring.
MQ 11. What is the status and trend of wilderness character?	Yes, Sipsey Wilderness continues to show improved visibility on the most impaired days while maintaining visibility on the clearest days since the previous reporting period. Across the full data record (1993–2024), average visual range on the most impaired days has increased substantially, from 15.3 kilometers to 74.15 kilometers. These gains are largely attributed to long-term reductions in sulfur dioxide emissions. Visibility impairment associated with nitrogen oxide emissions, primarily from anthropogenic sources, has remained relatively stable.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No
MQ 12. What are the status and trends of Wild and Scenic River conditions?	Uncertain	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No
MQ 13. Are the scenery and recreation settings changing and why?	Yes, Scenery and recreation settings remain consistent. No change.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 14. Are heritage sites being protected?	Yes. Heritage surveys are being conducted and sites (historic properties) are being protected.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Address consultation with our Tribal partners and expand so they know the fuller number of forest management activities that they may wish to consult on.
MQ 15. Are watersheds maintained (and where necessary restored) to provide resilient and stable conditions to support the quality and quantity of water necessary to protect ecological functions and support intended beneficial uses?	Uncertain. Formal monitoring did not occur this period. The lack of a Hydrologist or Soil Scientist impacts adequate monitoring and project development. Informal limited monitoring indicates Forest Plan intent is met.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No Conduct monitoring.
MQ 16. What are the conditions and trends of riparian area, wetland and floodplain functions and values?	Uncertain.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – No 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities – Yes 4 New Assessment Rec – No New projects should consider management of riparian areas as per Forest Plan direction. Conduct monitoring.

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 17. How do actual outputs and services compare with projected?	Yes, FACTS database results indicate that we are meeting objectives as planned.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Final harvest projections should be reassessed to better match current ecological priorities and operational capacity. Future targets may need adjustment to reflect the ongoing emphasis on thinning and restoration treatments. Evaluate the constraints affecting regeneration harvest outputs to determine whether plan objectives, workforce capacity, or market conditions need updating.
MQ 18. Are silvicultural requirements of the Forest Plan being met?	Yes, the requirements are being met and tracked in the Forest Service Activity Tracking System (FACTS)	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Forest Plan amendment is needed to increase the harvest openings maximize size limitation to help achieve desired ecological conditions where undesirable loblolly pine should be regenerated with desirable longleaf pine on suitable site types and soil conditions as directed by the Forest Plan. Increase targeted silvicultural follow-up on units with early signs of stress or poor establishment. Investigate longleaf pine performance, focusing on moisture limitations, or pest activity in affected stands.

Monitoring question (MQ)	Progress Toward Land Management Plan Desired Conditions and Objectives	Recommended Actions/Next Steps
MQ 19. Are Forest Plan objectives and standards being applied and accomplishing their intended purpose?	Yes-The Forest Plan objectives and standards are being applied and the accomplishments are being reported in Forest Activity Tracking System (FACTS)	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes 2 Changes to Monitoring – No 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– No 4 New Assessment Rec – No Complete forest plan amendment analysis to determine lands available for leasing with stipulations. Update forest plan to align current goals with current output.
MQ 20. How has climate variability changed and how is it projected to change across the region?	No – Not addressed in Forest Plan Uncertain.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes, add question 2 Changes to Monitoring – Yes, add indicators 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No Update forest plan and monitoring.
MQ 21. How is climate variability and change influencing the ecological, social, and economic conditions and contributions provided by plans areas in the region?	No – Not addressed in Forest Plan Uncertain.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes, add question 2 Changes to Monitoring – Yes, add indicators 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No Update forest plan and monitoring.
MQ 22. What effects do national forests in the region have on a changing climate?	No – Not addressed in Forest Plan Uncertain.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes, add question 2 Changes to Monitoring – Yes, add indicators 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No Update forest plan and monitoring.
MQ 23. What changes are occurring in the social, cultural, and economic conditions in the areas influenced by national forests in the region?	No – Not addressed in Forest Plan. Uncertain.	1 Changes to Forest Plan – Yes, add question 2 Changes to Monitoring – Yes, add indicators 3 Changes to Mgmt Activities– Uncertain 4 New Assessment Rec – No Update forest plan and monitoring.

Appendix A Contributors and Partners

Contributors

Resource Specialist	Role
LaToya Soto	Biennial Monitoring & Evaluation Report Coordinator
Allison Cochran	Biennial Monitoring & Evaluation Report Coordinator
Dagmar Thurmond	Natural Resources and Planning Staff Officer
Ryan Shurette	Forest Biologist
John Moran	Forest Fisheries Biologist
Osama Aiyad	Forest GIS Specialist
Aaron Radford	Fire Management Officer
Scott Turner	Forest Fire Planner
Marcus Ridley	Forest Archaeologist
Daks Kennedy	Recreation, Engineering, Lands, Heritage, and Minerals Staff Officer
Lisbeth Ruiz	NRM Program Specialist
Jacob Deal	Regional Air Resource Specialist
Eugene Brooks	Forest Silviculturist
Brian Waldrep	Forest Timber Contracting Officer
Cameron Seals	Recreation Program Manager
JD Smith	Forest Engineer
Jason Harris	District Silviculturist

Partners

Forest partners include, but are not limited to, the following:

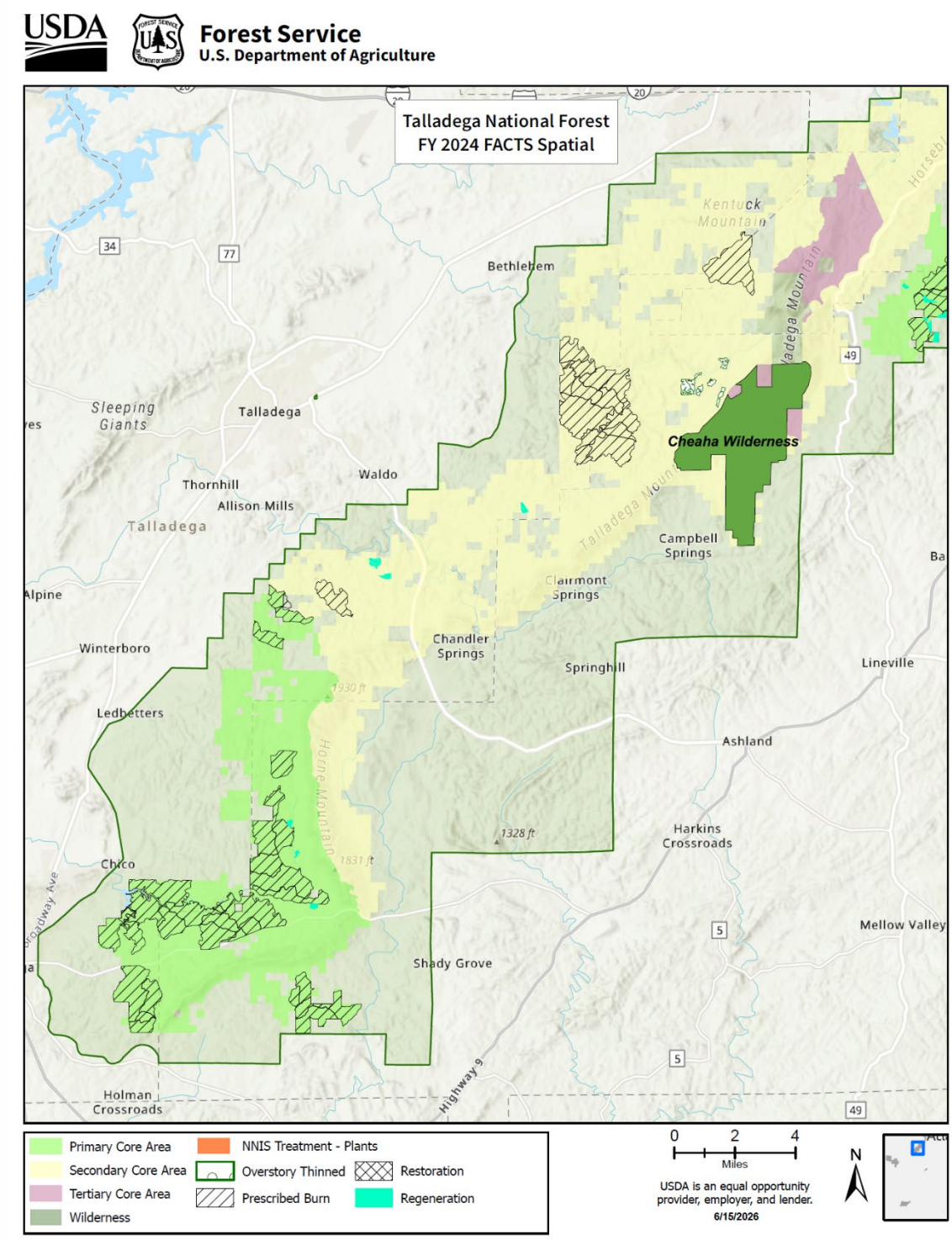
Alabama A&M University	Geological Survey of Alabama
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources	Jena Band of Choctaw Indians
Alabama Department of Environmental Management	Poarch Band of Creek Indians
Alabama Forestry Commission	Southern Research Station
Alabama Power Company	State Historic Preservation Office
Alabama Rivers and Streams Network	Tennessee State University
Alabama Water Watch	The Longleaf Alliance
Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town	The Muscogee (Creek) Nation
Auburn University	The Nature Conservancy
Chickasaw Nation	University of Alabama
Choctaw Nation	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	Wild Alabama
Alabama Trails Foundation	Alabama Forestry Foundation
Central Florida Zoological Society	

Appendix B Game Harvest Summary

Table 13. Number of harvested deer reported by Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources NFsAL – for NF and WMA.

NF	2023-24 Season			2024-25 Season		
	Bucks	**Does**	**Total**	**Bucks**	**Does**	**Total**
Bankhead National Forest	123	40	163	94	43	137
Conecuh National Forest	72	44	116	88	82	170
Talladega National Forest	198	76	274	255	94	349
Tuskegee National Forest	19	10	29	48	15	63
WMA	**2023-24 Season**			**2024-25 Season**		
	Bucks	**Does**	**Total**	**Bucks**	**Does**	**Total**
Black Warrior	115	40	155	99	33	132
Blue Spring	79	36	115	81	59	140
Boggy Hollow	15	7	22	17	19	36
Choccolocco	96	60	156	8	1	9
Hollins	59	24	83	59	27	86
Oakmulgee	171	81	252	138	86	224
Grand Total	**1365**			**1346**		

Appendix C Maps of Ecosystem Restoration and Maintenance Activities



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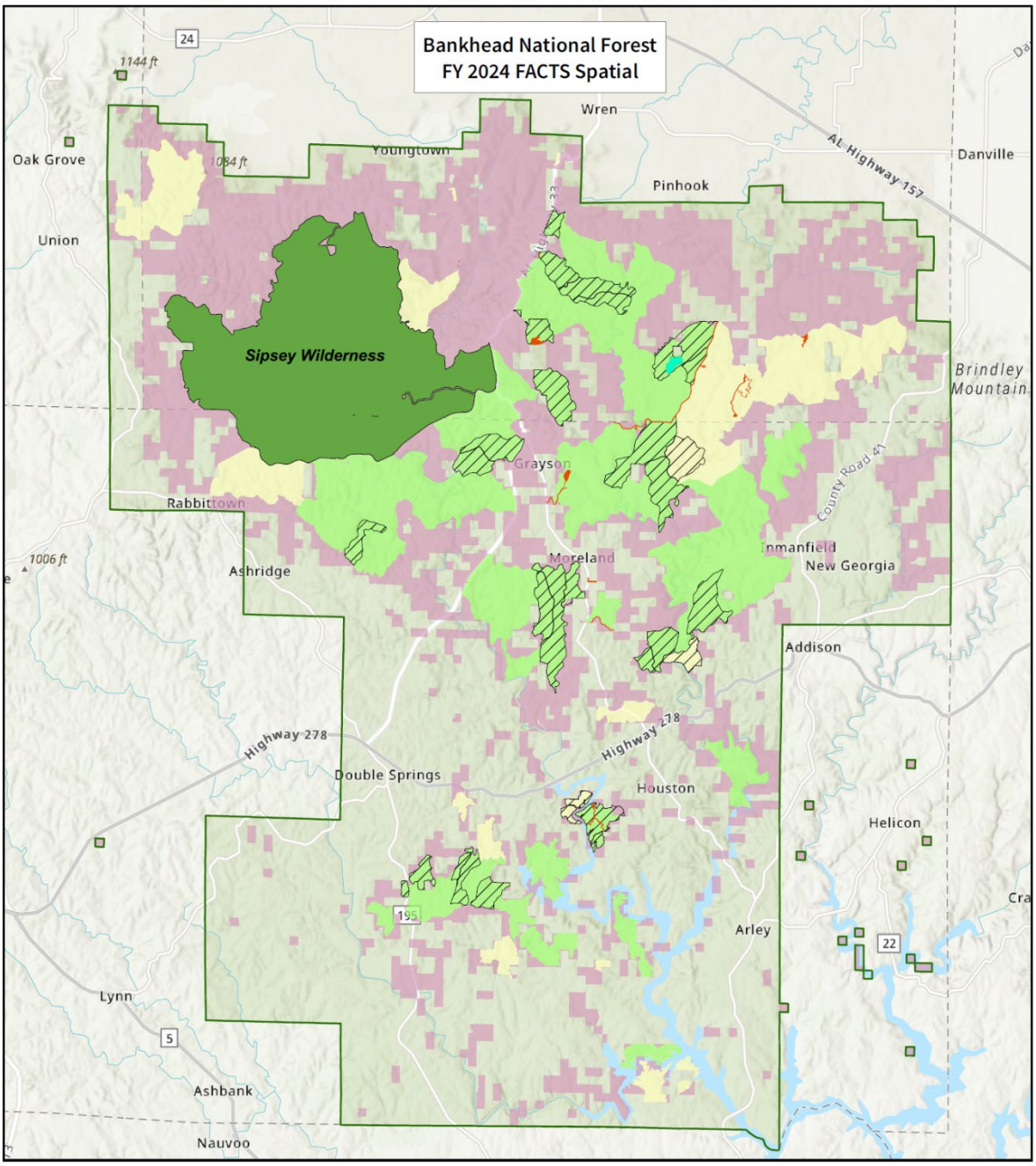
U.S. Department of Agriculture



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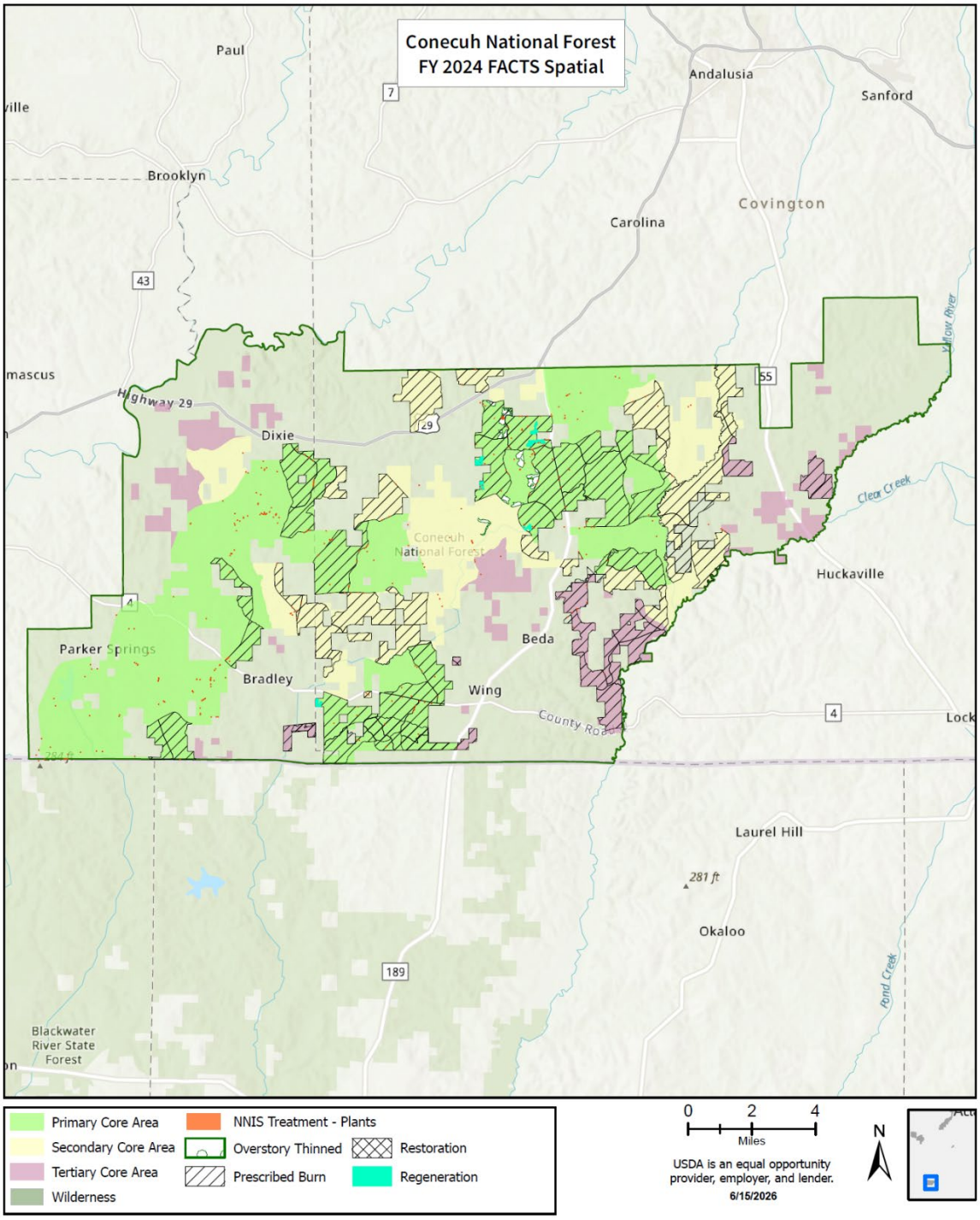
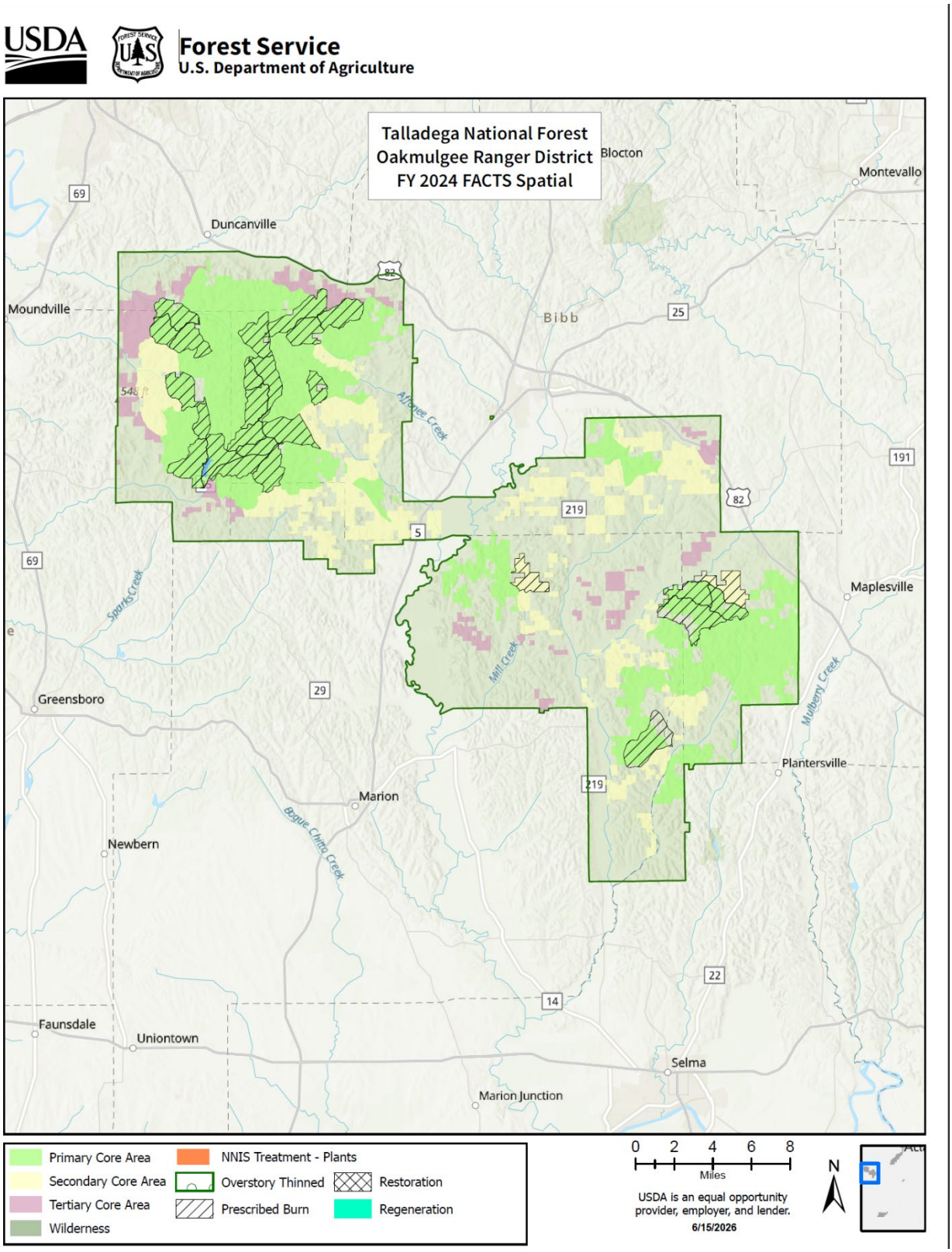
U.S. Department of Agriculture




USDA
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Talladega National Forest
Oakmulgee Ranger District
FY 2024 FACTS Spatial
Blocton
Montevallo
Duncanville
Moundville
Bibb
Maplesville
Greensboro
Marion
Plantersville
Newbern
Faunsdale
Uniontown
Selma
Marion Junction
Sparks Creek
Mill Creek
Mulberry Creek
Bogue Chitto Creek
Primary Core Area
Secondary Core Area
Tertiary Core Area
Wilderness
NNIS Treatment - Plants
Overstory Thinned
Prescribed Burn
Restoration
Regeneration
0 2 4 6 8
Miles
N
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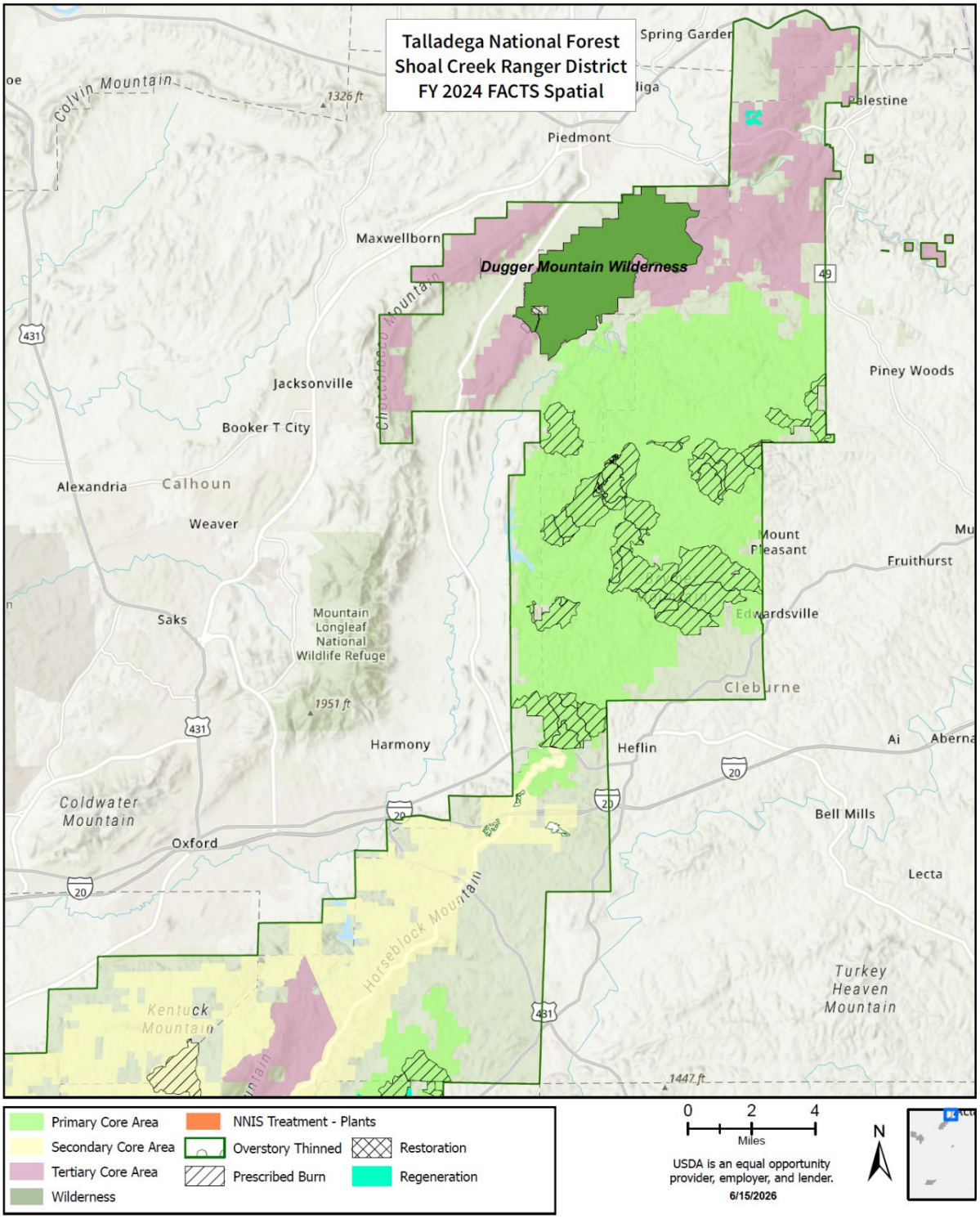

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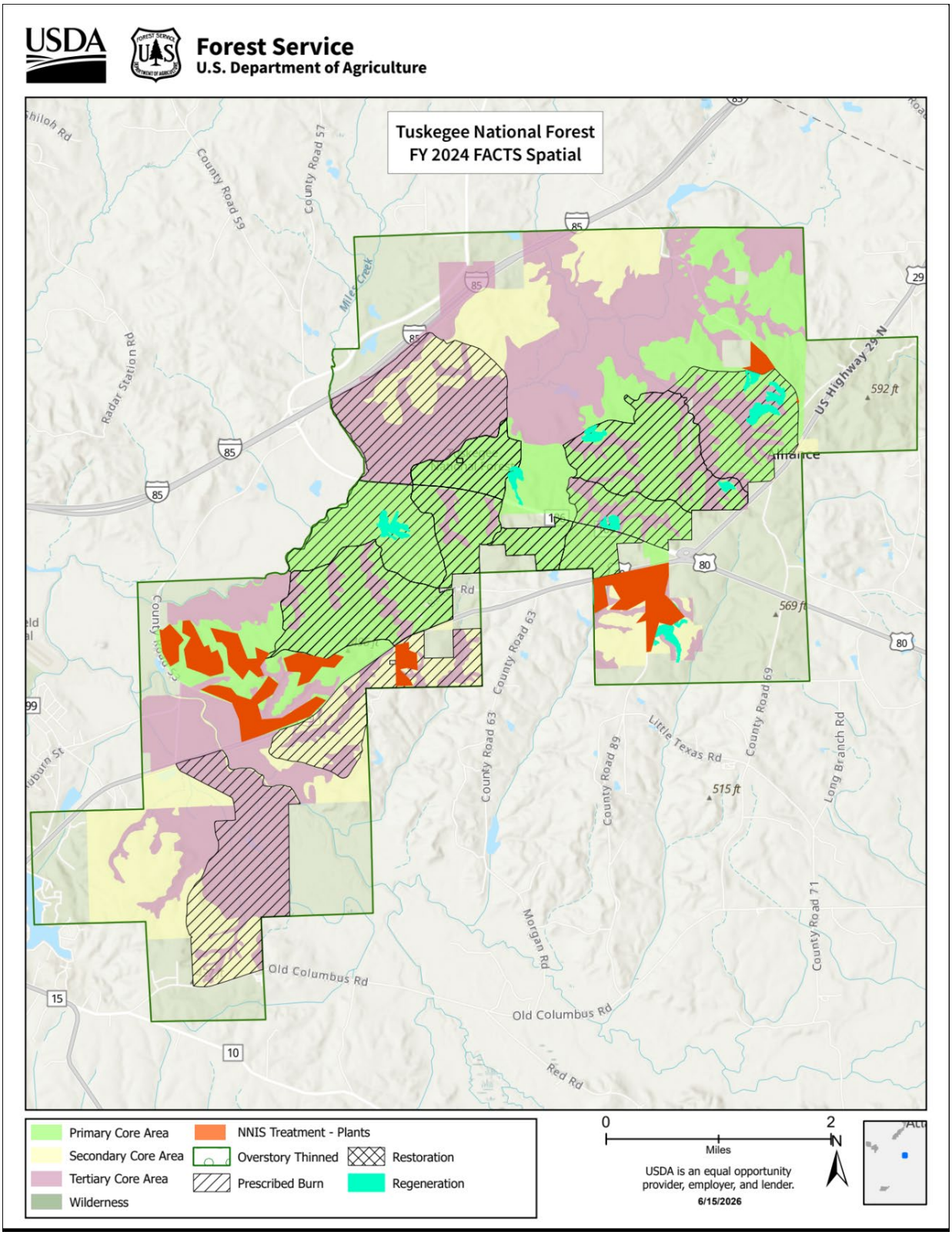
USDA
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Tuskegee National Forest
FY 2024 FACTS Spatial
Primary Core Area
Secondary Core Area
Tertiary Core Area
Wilderness
NNIS Treatment - Plants
Overstory Thinned
Prescribed Burn
Restoration
Regeneration
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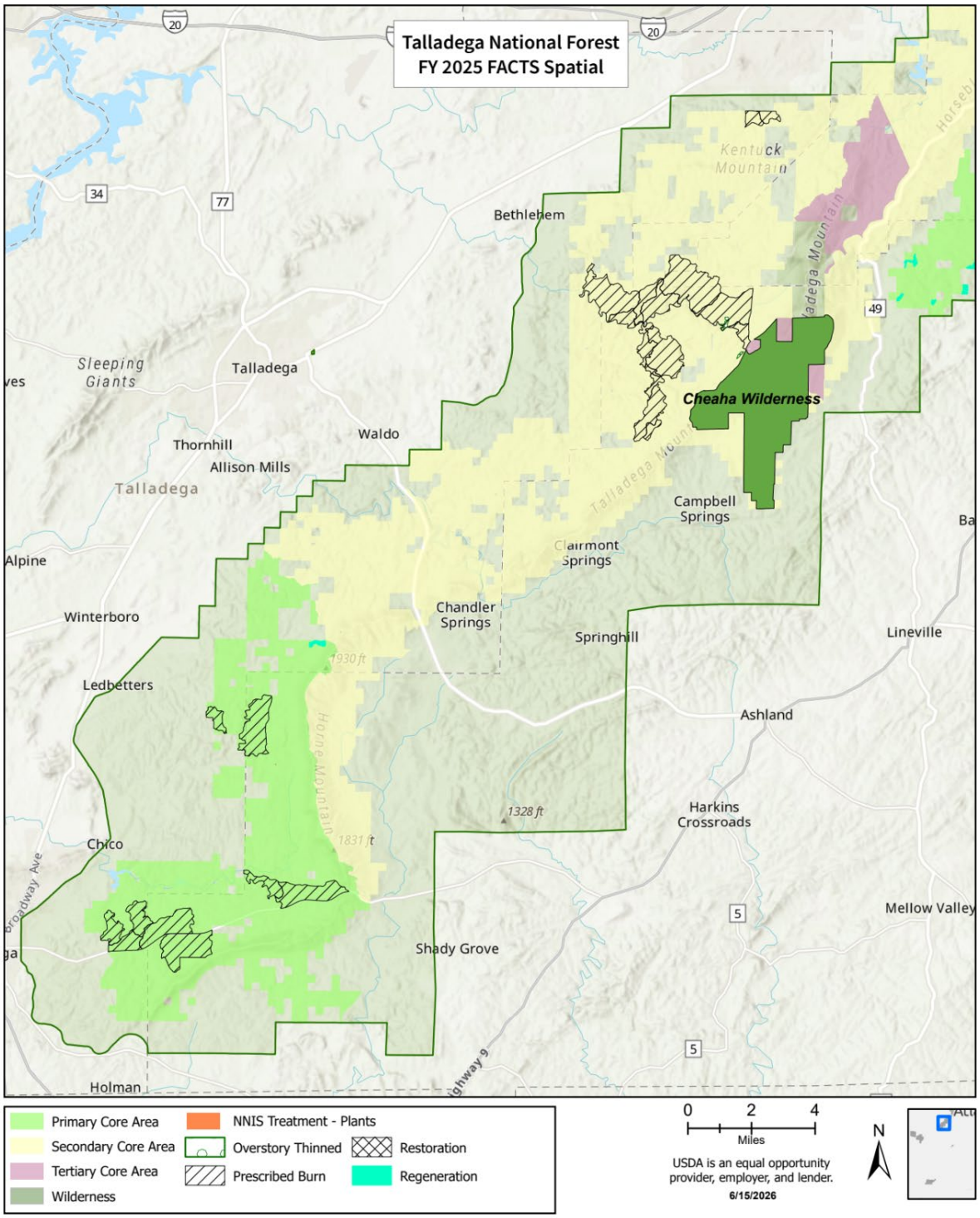

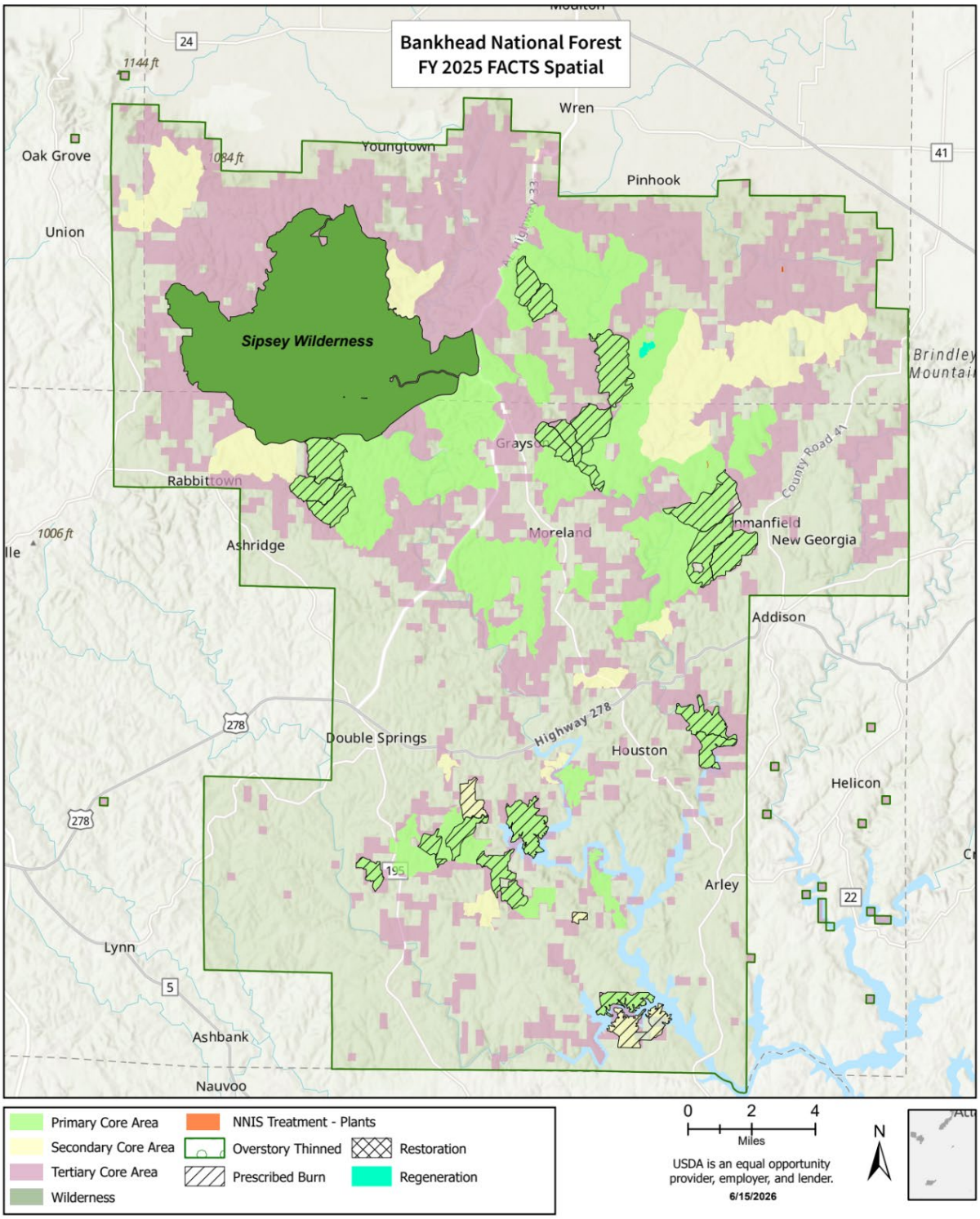
USDA
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Bankhead National Forest
FY 2025 FACTS Spatial
Sipsey Wilderness
Oak Grove
Union
Youngtown
Wren
Pinhook
Grays
Rabbittown
Ashridge
Moreland
New Georgia
Addison
Double Springs
Houston
Helicon
Arley
Lynn
Ashbank
Nauvoo
Highway 278
County Road 41
1144 ft
1084 ft
1006 ft
24
41
278
195
22
5
Primary Core Area
Secondary Core Area
Tertiary Core Area
Wilderness
NNIS Treatment - Plants
Overstory Thinned
Prescribed Burn
Restoration
Regeneration
0 2 4
Miles
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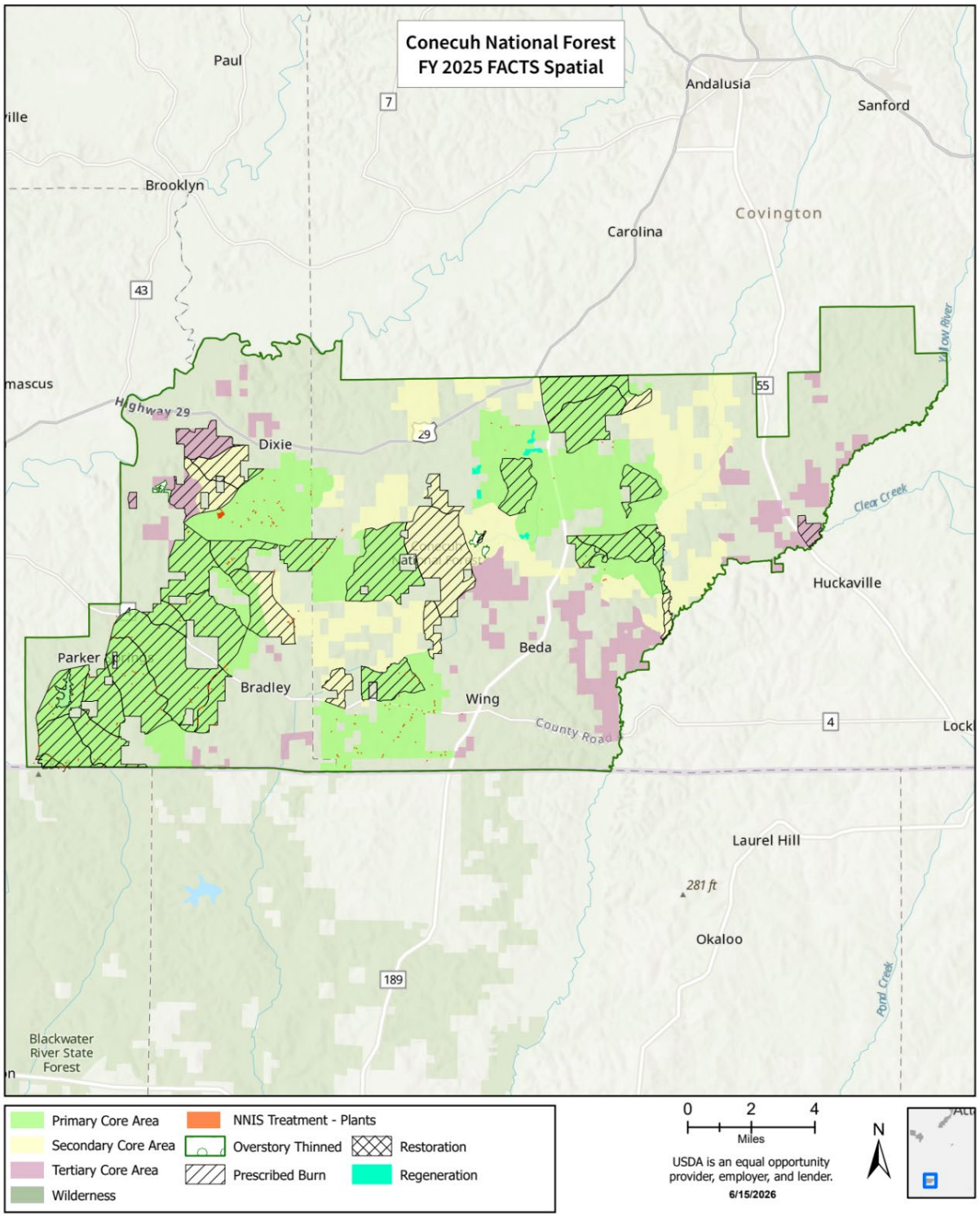
USDA
Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Conecuh National Forest
FY 2025 FACTS Spatial
Paul
Andalusia
Sanford
Brooklyn
Covington
Carolina
Highway 29
Dixie
Huckaville
Beda
Parker
Bradley
Wing
County Road
Laurel Hill
281 ft
Okaloo
Blackwater
River State
Forest
Primary Core Area
Secondary Core Area
Tertiary Core Area
Wilderness
NNIS Treatment - Plants
Overstory Thinned
Prescribed Burn
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Regeneration
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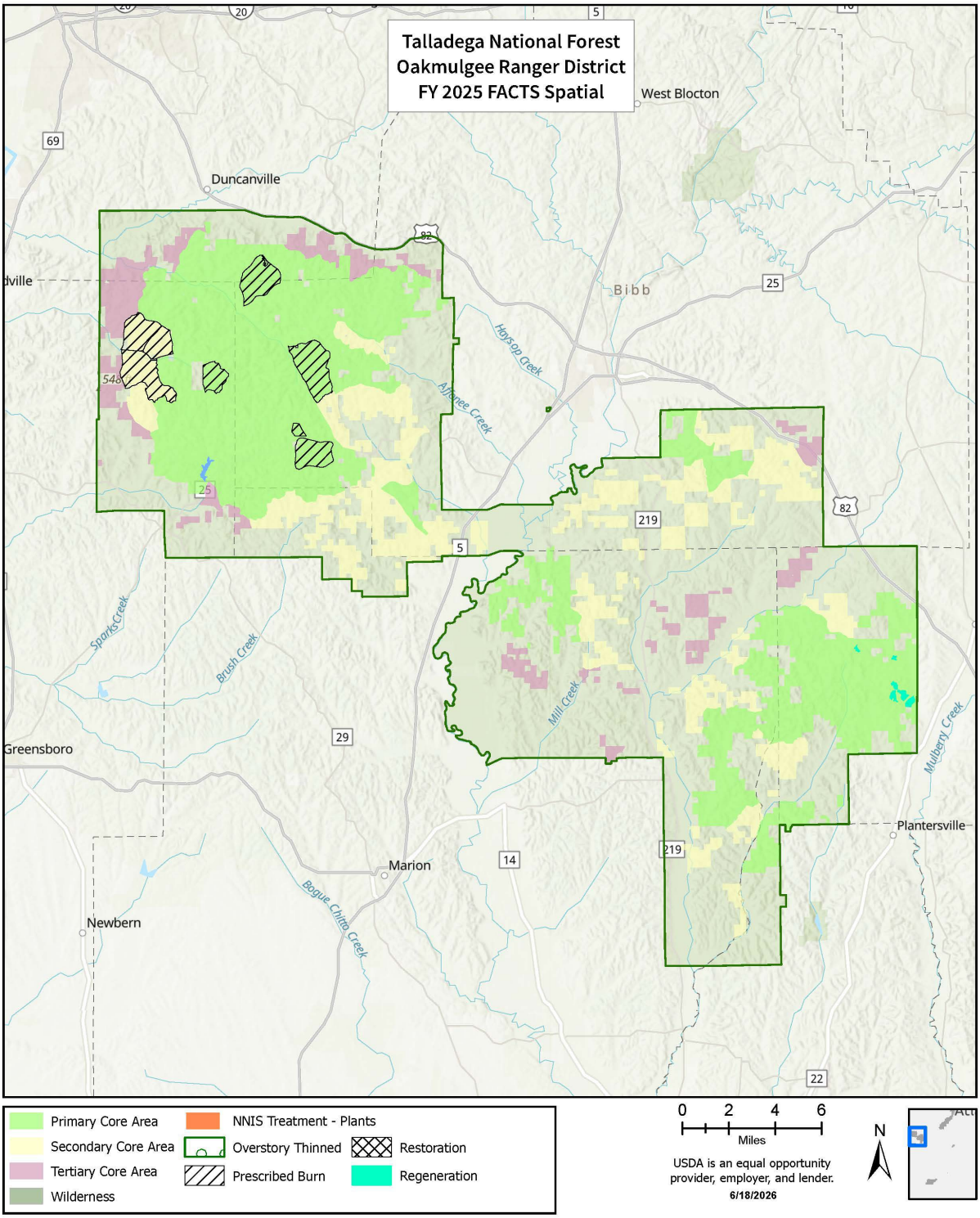

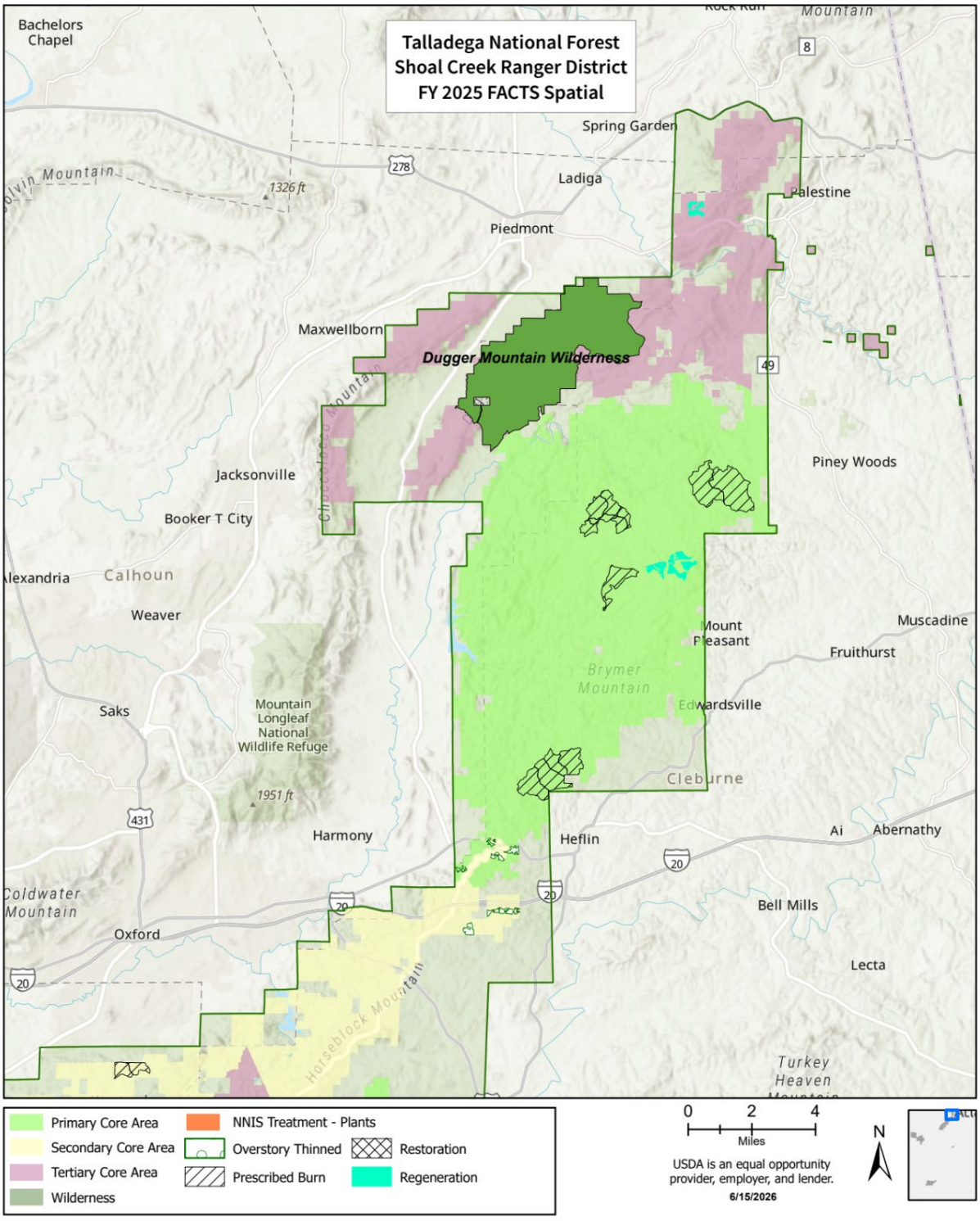
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Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Talladega National Forest
Shoal Creek Ranger District
FY 2025 FACTS Spatial
Bachelors Chapel
Spring Garden
Ladiga
Palestine
Piedmont
Maxwellborn
Dugger Mountain Wilderness
Jacksonville
Piney Woods
Booker T City
Calhoun
Weaver
Mount Pleasant
Muscadine
Fruithurst
Brymer Mountain
Saks
Mountain Longleaf National Wildlife Refuge
Cleburne
Harmony
Heflin
Abernathy
Bell Mills
Oxford
Lecta
Turkey Heaven
1326 ft
1951 ft
Primary Core Area
Secondary Core Area
Tertiary Core Area
Wilderness
NNIS Treatment - Plants
Overstory Thinned
Prescribed Burn
Restoration
Regeneration
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Miles
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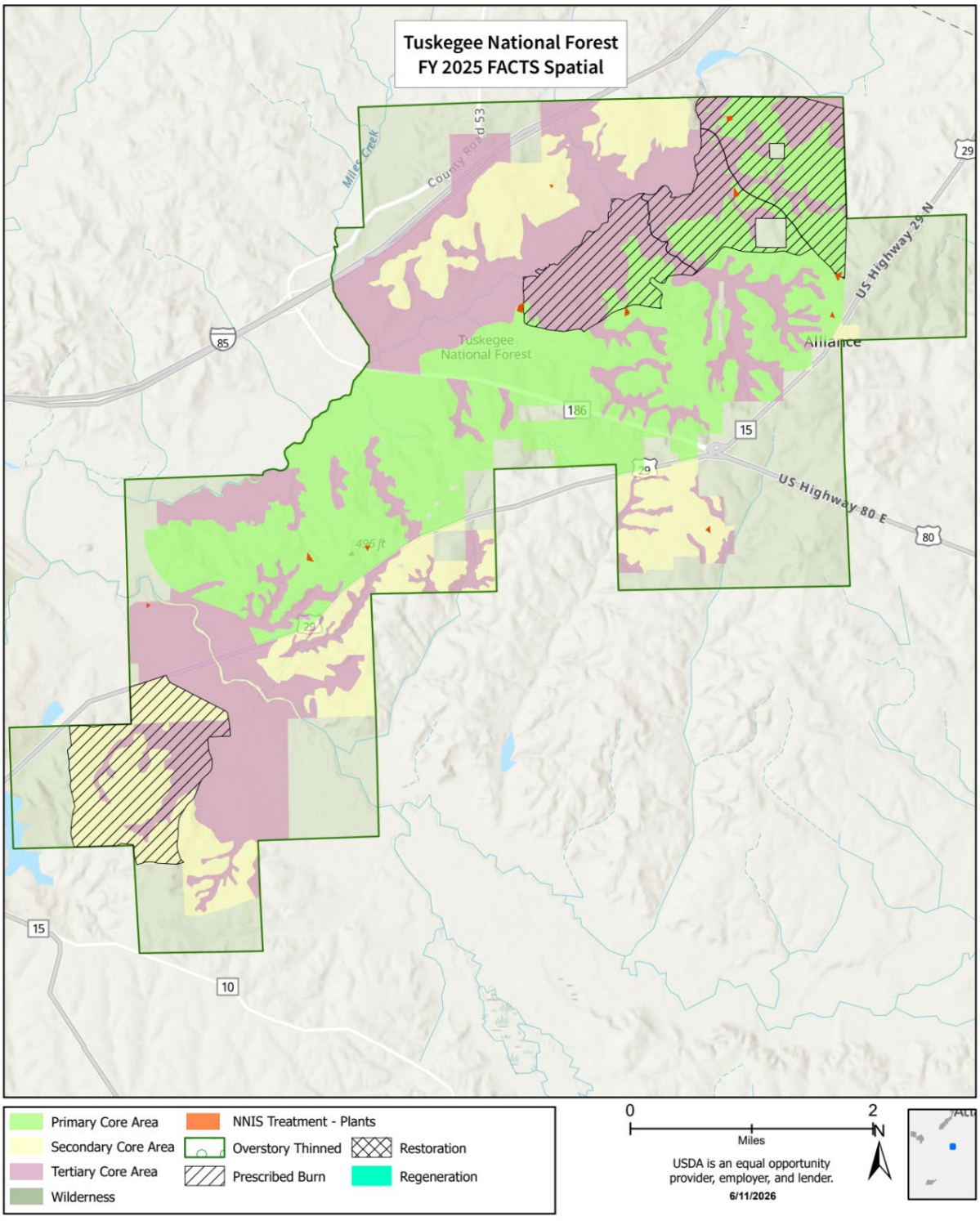

Appendix D National Forests in Alabama Strategy to Participate in the R8 Million Acre Challenge

Executive Summary

On October 23, 2017, the Southern Region issued the Million Acre Challenge to put an additional one million acres of National Forest System lands on the path towards longleaf restoration. As part of the Southern Region's goal of one million acres, the National Forests in Alabama was assigned a goal of 40,970 acres.

This strategy uses an integrated approach based on specific action items in current and future NEPA decisions that implement the National Forests in Alabama Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The National Forests in Alabama Restoration Strategy focuses on areas with opportunities to achieve multiple goals and objectives, such as restoring forest health and resilience, Red-cockaded Woodpecker habitat, open woodland structure and native, fire-maintained ecosystems and watersheds, by the application of timber harvests and prescribed fire. This will serve as a roadmap for achieving the goals outlined in the Million Acre Challenge. Our partners are a key component in our ability to be successful and this strategy responds to the concerns of our key stakeholders as we take steps to reach our shared goals of longleaf restoration in the Southern Region's Million Acre Challenge. This also represents collaboration across the range of longleaf through ***America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative***.

Current Situation

The National Forests in Alabama encompass approximately 670,000 acres. The Forest consists of four proclaimed national forests: Bankhead, Conecuh, Talladega and Tuskegee, managed through six ranger districts, located across Alabama. There are four broad historically-present plant or vegetative communities located within these Forests: longleaf pine, shortleaf pine/oak-hickory, mixed hardwood/loblolly pine, and riparian forest communities. The theme of the RLRMP focused on reestablishing the composition, structure, and function associated with these historic forested ecosystems.

What sets Alabama apart is its incredible diversity. This extends through Alabama's geology and physiographic regions and results in plant, aquatic animal and terrestrial habitat diversity. Fire-maintained native upland ecosystems like longleaf, shortleaf and upland pine-oaks occur on each management unit. The Bankhead National Forest lies in the Southern Cumberland Plateau. The Talladega Division (Shoal Creek and Talladega Ranger Districts) occurs on the southern edge of the Southern Ridge and Valley, with portions of its southern extent in the Piedmont physiographic region. These two management units fall within the Southern Appalachian ecoregion. The Oakmulgee Division and Tuskegee National Forest lie at the edge of the Fall Line that demarcates the Upper Coastal Plain. The Oakmulgee Division is in west central Alabama and the Tuskegee is in east central Alabama. The Conecuh National Forest is in the Lower Coastal Plain physiographic region, bordering the state of Florida. The Oakmulgee, Tuskegee and Conecuh management units fall within the East Gulf Coastal Plain ecoregion. Fire-maintained, native, upland ecosystems in each of these regions experienced exploitative harvesting and several decades of fire exclusion resulting in under-representation of these ecosystems in today's landscape.

Revised 07/02/2018

Table 1: Existing vs Potential Acreage of Longleaf Pine (FT = 21, 26) Communities

Forest Unit (Total Ac)	2002 Existing LL Acreage (ac)	2017 Existing LL Acreage (ac)	Opportunities for Restoration (ac)	RLRMP Long-term Objective Acreage* (ac)	Existing Acreage of Total Objective (%)	Composition of Total Forested Landscape** (%)
Longleaf Pine (NFAL)	150,792	160,430	40,970	201,400	80%	30%
Bankhead (185K ac)	2,196			7,400	30%	4%
Conecuh (84K ac)	41,478			50,000	83%	60%
Oakmulgee(158K ac)	61,965			80,000	78%	51%
Talladega Division (231K ac)	43,024			60,000	72%	26%
Tuskegee (11K ac)	2,129			4,000	54%	37%

* Acreage based upon 2004 RLRMP EIS (pg. 3-114 thru 3-125)
** Based upon total forest acreage of 670,000 acres

Million Acre Challenge Acreage

Based on the Forest RLRMP, the long-term objective for longleaf pine acreage is 201,400. Currently the Forest has approximately 160,430 acres of existing longleaf pine forest types. The current longleaf acreage, accounts for approximately 80% of the Forest's long-term acreage goal. In order to meet the spirit and intent of the Million Acre Challenge, the National Forests in Alabama has developed a 5-year strategy for putting approximately 40,970 acres on the path towards longleaf restoration. This plan is based on an integrated approach tiered to the RLRMP and collaboration with our partners and stakeholders.

To aid in the prioritization of longleaf restoration opportunities, National Forests in Alabama analyzed and mapped previous management actions beginning with the implementation of the 2004 RLRMP. Identifying these areas enabled the Forest to prioritize where future restoration efforts should be focused in order to capitalize on previous investments. During the first 13 years under the RLRMP (2005-2017) the Forest met or exceeded the desired acreage for prescribed burning. However, the Forest consistently fell short on meeting objectives for restoration and thinning. During this time period the Forest restored approximately 16,000 acres of off-site species to longleaf pine, thinned 42,100 - acres of young and intermediate pine stands, and treated approximately 9,726 acres for non-native invasive species, all at rates well below the targeted outputs listed in the RLRMP. Acreages are as reported in M&E Reports with FACTS as the data source.

The Forest will employ the Three Step Trigger System to capture longleaf ecosystem restoration work accomplished during the past 10-year period, in a re-evaluation and update to FACTS and FSVeg data to be performed, culminating in the summer of 2018. The Forest will analyze specific activities in silvicultural prescriptions that contributed to achieving the desired future condition of a functional longleaf ecosystem. Looking forward over the next 5-year implementation period, each unit on the Forest prepared a District 5-Year Plan (updated annually) and these plans established priorities that emphasize the restoration of native

ecosystems using management tools such as timber sales, conversion of off-site species, prescribed burning, mid-story removal, non-native invasive species treatments, and native herbaceous species plantings. These planned treatments incrementally implement the RLRMP and feed the Forest's out-year Integrated Program of Work.

Table 2 displays the past 5 years of management actions contributing to longleaf restoration. These actions include stand restoration to longleaf pine through final harvest of off-site species, plantation first-thinnings and intermediate thinning, prescribed fire, mid-story removal, non-native species treatments and native species plantings. Duplicate acres of prescribed fire were not counted in the accomplished acres. The table also compares the outputs for the next 8 year period based upon the district's 5-Year Plans and fulfillment of the Million Acre Challenge and shows the average yearly increase in outputs compared to the previous 5 year period.

Table 2. Management Action 5-Year Outputs (2013-2017) compared to next 8-Year Planned Outputs (2018-2025)

	2013 to 2017		2018 to 2025			
Management Action	**Total 5-Year Outputs (ac)**	**Average Yearly Outputs (ac)**	**8-Year Planned Outputs (ac)[1]**	**Average Yearly Outputs (ac)**	**Increase in Average Yearly Outputs over next 5-years (ac)**	**RLRMP Yearly Output Goal (ac)**
Restoration of Off-site species	5,415	1,083	16,493	2,062	979	3,178[2]
Thinning	17,469	3,494	24,477	3,059	n/a	1,843[2]
Mid-story Removal	1,824	365	4,000	500	n/a	n/a
Rx Fire[3]	525,265	105,053	600,000[4]	120,000	n/a	70,000[5]
Non-native Invasive Plant Species Treatments	4,229	846	8,000	1,000	154	n/a
Native Species Plantings	45	9	400	50	n/a	n/a
Total Acres	**29,982**	-----		----	---	

[1] Includes outputs from activities listed in scheduled NEPA decisions, Appendix A.
[2] Years 11-20 Forest Plan Projected Harvested Acres (RLRMP FEIS at p.3-447)
[3] Prescribed burned acres for display only, they are not counted in total accomplishments.
[4] Total acres planned to be prescribed burned during 5-year period, some acres will be burned more than once during the period, acres include longleaf, fuel reduction and shortleaf-oak-hickory restoration and maintenance goals.
[5] RLRMP at page 2-53.

By combining management activities implemented on the ground and covered under signed prescriptions for the previous 10 year period along with the planned activities over the next 8 year period the Forest will have 201,400 acres on the path to longleaf restoration as outlined in the Three Step Trigger System developed by the Regional Office. Appendix A shows the Forest 5-Year Plan for scheduled NEPA decisions and subsequent silvicultural prescriptions within the 4 longleaf sub-management areas. The total treatment acres for the next 5 year period listed in Appendix A are higher than those listed in Table 2 above due to differences in prescribed total acres vs. post-treatment actual acres treated. Table 2 above counts treated acres only once, even though they may receive multiple treatments, i.e. thinning, prescribed burning, and mid-story activities.

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Focus Areas for Longleaf Restoration

Based upon the RLRMP, and the Local Implementation Teams (LITs) for longleaf pine that have grown up around units of the National Forests in Alabama, the Forest has identified two primary longleaf restoration emphasis areas. These areas were selected, in part, due to past integrated management activities which have resulted in restoring characteristics of longleaf communities. Focusing restoration efforts in these emphasis areas will enabled the Forest to capitalize on previous management investments and design projects to meet multiple restoration objectives.

- ***Talladega – Mountain Longleaf Conservation Partnership Local Implementation Team***

Three ranger districts making up the Talladega National Forest occur within the Talladega-Mountain Longleaf LIT. A forest-wide Joint Chiefs Project for National Forests in Alabama and the Natural Resources Conservation Service has just been completed. FY2018 is currently the 3rd and final year of implementation. The project goal was to collaboratively accelerate restoration of longleaf pine and other native ecosystems expanding the continuity, health and resiliency of these ecosystems across public and private lands. This project will continue to build on the success of the Joint Chief's Project by working closely with the Talladega-Mountain Longleaf LIT to expand opportunities to advance restoration of the longleaf ecosystem in this Significant Geographical Area as identified in the *Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine*. The following management actions are planned to be accomplished on the Talladega National Forest over the next 5-year period:

  - *Restoration of off-site (Stand Conversion) – 12,000 acres,*
  - *Plantation first thinning and Intermediate thinning – 16,000 acres,*
  - *Mid-story removal - 3,600 acres,*
  - *Prescribed Burning – 300,000 acres,*
  - *NNIS – 720 acres.*

- ***Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership Longleaf Local Implementation Team***

The Conecuh National Forest was the first to recognize the need for longleaf restoration and took the first steps in its longleaf EIS, completed in 1999. The Gulf Coastal Plain Ecosystem Partnership, began in 1996, and has been a collaboration partner to Conecuh in efforts to restore longleaf for over 20 years. The collaboration has been so long, diverse and successful as to have evolved into efforts to restore other components of the ecosystem, such as: native understory plants and communities, bog ecosystems and indigo snake habitats and populations. Thinning, non-native species control and prescribed burning are core activities necessary to maintain habitats that have been restored. Some

restoration of off-site slash stands remains to be done as well. The 5-year program of work for Conecuh includes:

- *Restoration of off-site (Stand Conversion) – 1,250 acres*
- *Plantation first thinning and Intermediate thinning -12,000 acres*
- *Mid-story Removal*
- *Prescribed Burning – 125,000 acres*
- *Non-Native Species Control – 340 acres*

Opportunities for Increasing Longleaf Restoration

- ***Program Integration*** – The Forest will work across functional and district boundaries to improve integration across all disciplines for project planning, budgeting, and implementation for restoration activities. District and Forest staff will work together to ensure that program integration is maximized to the fullest extent across the Forest. FSVeg, FACTS Spatial and GIS treatment layers will be updated annually to add data to those layers already created which display restoration efforts.
- ***Increasing Capacity*** – The Forest will continue to utilize current and new stewardship and Good Neighbor Authority opportunities to help build capacity in delivering restoration activities within the focus areas. Some of the activities will include restoration activities, non-native invasive plant eradication, native plant reintroductions, and watershed improvement activities which reduce soil erosion and enhance water quality. The Forest currently has four existing Good Neighbor Authority Agreements with AFC/FFS/AWFF. The Forest will continue to explore additional opportunities with state agencies, our Tribal Governments, and contracts to increase work capacity.
- ***Forest Priorities*** – National Forests in Alabama priorities are aligned with Regional and National priorities which will provide consistent messaging that restoration of our native plant communities is an Agency priority. The Forest Supervisor and Rangers will be engaged at both the Forest and District levels to provide leadership and align Forest goals with Regional and National goals.
- ***NEPA Efficiencies*** – The Forest will focus on gaining NEPA efficiencies by using the full suite of NEPA tools and expanding contracting for NEPA analyses to include archeology, flora and fauna surveys. Line Officer engagement is critical throughout the entire NEPA process to ensure that the analyses are commensurate with the need for informed decisions.

Challenges for Longleaf Restoration

- ***Project Planning*** – Some districts are better positioned than others for implementable, NEPA ready projects. This Forest does not staff NEPA positions on districts. District assistants perform NEPA roles as collateral duties. The Forest NEPA Planner maintains a spreadsheet to track and prioritize needs across the Forest which helps Forest Leadership make informed decisions.
- ***Constraints within RCW Habitat Management Areas (HMAs)*** – The RLRMP limits the size of restoration cuts to 25 acres and the percentage of acres in the 0-10 age classes to 8.3

percent within HMAs across the Forest. Foraging requirements for active RCW clusters and recruitment clusters can sometimes be a limiting factor for restoration opportunities. The Forest has initiated conversations with the local USFWS Field Office about reducing foraging requirements for RCW clusters within project areas. These permissions have been granted in the past.

- ***Funding Needs for Additional Capacity –*** There are concerns related to the funding needed to support NEPA analyses and associated archeology, flora and fauna surveys. Although the Forest is focusing efforts on gaining efficiencies in planning and implementation, additional funding will be needed to support contracts and Good Neighbor Authority Agreements.
- ***Addressing FSVeg data issues –*** The Forest has an IDIQ contract for Stand Exams and several collaborative agreements with qualified entities to gather common stand exam data. Now, resolving FSVeg data entry and gaps and minor component questions are the next step to receive QA/QC attention and updating.
- ***Alignment with Integrated Program of Work*** – The Forest began analyzing restoration in March of 2017 and therefore aligned our 2018 IPW needs with those goals.
- ***Resolving long term challenges*** – The Forest will use, to the fullest extent, the NEPA Support Services BPA awardees to accomplish work, over the long term (2019-2025)
    - Realize a marked increase in integrated NEPA ready projects.
    - Annually assess current conditions to determine net increase in longleaf acres.
    - Annually work with forests to take full advantage of existing grant opportunities and seek out additional grant opportunities with new and existing partners.
    - Work with partners and industry to locate and collect additional seed.
    - In addition to increasing acres of longleaf pine, focus efforts on maintenance of existing longleaf stands and improving ecosystem components.

Supply and Availability of Longleaf Seed

The National Forests in Alabama will need to restore by restoration clear-cut of off-site species 16,493 acres in eight years (2018-2025.) Assuming a level rate of accomplishment this results in a projection of 2,062 acres per year needing reforestation to longleaf pine. Almost all of this will need to be planted with containerized longleaf.

Summary

The Forest will continue to use an integrated approach tiered back to the RLRMP along with working with our partners and stakeholders to collaborate on longleaf restoration projects which will restore the land to a fully functional longleaf pine ecosystem. The National Forests in Alabama are well positioned to meet its goal for the Million Acre Challenge. By combining past management activities implemented on the ground and planned activities over the next 8 year period, the Forest will have 201,400 acres on the path to longleaf restoration by 2025 as outlined in the Three Step Trigger System developed by the Regional Office.

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APPENDIX A

Scheduled Longleaf Restoration NEPA Projects from District 5-Year Plans

Year	District	Project Name	Acres
2018	Oakmulgee	SPB Sales	1,212
	Shoal Crk	Post-Tornado Harvesting	2,369
	Talladega	Thinning and Data Clean up	601
	Conecuh	Boggy Hollow Sales and Cmpt 55/59	1,686
	Bankhead	Post-SPB Sales and Data Clean up	738
	Tuskegee	Compartment 18 Sale	193
		Sub-Total	**6,799**
2019	Oakmulgee	Perry Mountain	3,000
	Shoal Crk	Corax/Crotalus/Ivory	1,000
	Talladega		1,000
	Conecuh	Blue Spring West	1,000
	Bankhead	Houston/Forest Health Thinning	200
	Tuskegee	Upland Longleaf II	200
		Sub-Total	**6,400**
2020	Oakmulgee	Perry Mountain	3,000
	Shoal Crk	FY18 SPB Restoration	1,000
	Talladega	Sherman Cliffs	1,000
	Conecuh	Compartment 12/4 Thinning	1,000
	Bankhead	2017 Forest Health Thinning	200
	Tuskegee	Upland Longleaf II	200
		Sub-Total	**6,400**
2021	Oakmulgee	Perry Mountain	3,000
	Shoal Crk		1,000
	Talladega	Taylor Mill	1,000
	Conecuh	Compartment 40/67 Thinning	1,000
	Bankhead	2018 Forest Health Thinning	200
	Tuskegee	Upland Longleaf II	200
		Sub-Total	**6,400**
2022	Oakmulgee	South of Highway 25	3,000
	Shoal Crk		1,000
	Talladega		1,000
	Conecuh	Wolf Pit/Dixie	1,000
	Bankhead	2019 Forest Health Thinning	200
	Tuskegee	Upland Longleaf II	200
		Sub-Total	**6,400**

*Total treatment acres for the next 5-year period are higher than those listed in Table 2 due to total acres vs actual acres treated, and other restoration projects occurring on forest such as Shortleaf and Upland Oak/Hickory Restoration.

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Appendix E Recreational Events

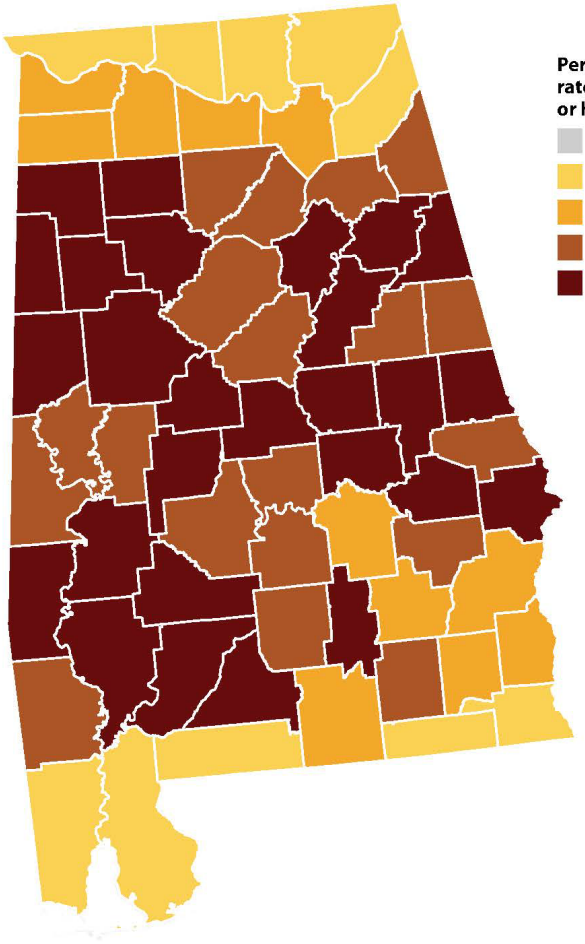
Event	Event Purpose	Unit	Issue Date
BOZEMAN, KEITH	OUTFITTING AND GUIDING SERVICE	Bankhead	1/30/2024
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/24/2024
NORTHEAST ALABAMA BICYCLE ASSOCIATION	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	5/9/2024
SHEARER, JASON	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/10/2024
CLARK, TREY	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/10/2024
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	9/7/2024
NORTHEAST ALABAMA BICYCLE ASSOCIATION	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	9/13/2024
BA SERVICES, INC	CONCESSION CAMPGROUND	Bankhead	8/30/2024
PERRY MOUNTAIN MOTORCYCLE CLUB, INC.	RECREATION EVENT	Oakmulgee	10/21/2024
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	10/31/2024
CHAIN BUSTER RACING, INC.	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	10/23/2024
PERRY MOUNTAIN MOTORCYCLE CLUB, INC.	RECREATION EVENT	Oakmulgee	3/3/2025
MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION OF ALABAMA, INC.	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/30/2025
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	2/21/2025
CLARK, TREY	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/9/2025
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/24/2025
BOZEMAN, KEITH	OUTFITTING AND GUIDING SERVICE	Bankhead	3/10/2025
JONES, BECKI	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	8/4/2025
UNBROKEN MEN MINISTRIES, INC	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	7/17/2025
CHAIN BUSTER RACING LLC	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	5/29/2025
NORTHEAST ALABAMA BICYCLE ASSOCIATION	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	5/15/2025
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	9/3/2025
PERRY MOUNTAIN MOTORCYCLE CLUB, INC.	RECREATION EVENT	Oakmulgee	10/16/2023
BOZEMAN, KEITH	OUTFITTING AND GUIDING SERVICE	Bankhead	1/30/2024
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	2/22/2024
CHAIN BUSTER RACING, INC.	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	10/25/2023
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	11/3/2023
Henderson, Todd	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/24/2024
SHEARER, JASON	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/10/2024
CLARK, TREY	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/10/2024
TOSCH, DAVID	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	4/11/2024

HYCHE, RUTGER	NON-COMMERCIAL GROUP USE	Bankhead	2/29/2024
SOUTHEAST ENDURANCE RIDERS ASSN	RECREATION EVENT	Talladega	4/16/2024
JONES, BECKI	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	5/7/2024
AUKAMP	RECREATION EVENT	Conecuh	3/7/2024
NORTHEAST ALABAMA BICYCLE ASSOCIATION	RECREATION EVENT	Shoal Creek	5/9/2024
ALABAMA STATE FOX HUNTERS ASSOCIATION	RECREATION EVENT	Conecuh	9/3/2024

Appendix F 2021 Southern Pine Beetle County Hazard Rating

USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

2021 SOUTHERN PINE BEETLE COUNTY HAZARD RATING FOR Alabama



*Hazard rating based on models from the 2012 National Insect and Disease Risk Map (NIDRM) using forest parameters from 2019 and accounting for major forest disturbances through 2021
–Moderate hazard = Areas projected to lose 11 to 24% of host basal area to SPB
–High hazard = Areas projected to lose 25% or more of host basal area to SPB