

**Bankhead National Forest
Liaison Panel
Meeting Agenda
Moulton Rec Center
January 21, 2016**

6:00	Meeting Facilitator Introduction Ground rules review	Andy Scott Research Scientist, USFS, Huntsville
6:15	District Ranger Welcome & Updates & Big Tree Fire Summary	Dave Casey District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead Mike Cook ORA, USFS, Bankhead
6:45	Forest Health & Restoration Projects & Stewardship Proposal (Houston Longleaf EA, 2016 Bankhead Forest Health CE, Next Steps/Future Projects)	Lorenzo Walton Forester, USFS, Bankhead Allison Cochran Wildlife Biologist, Bankhead Dave Casey District Ranger
7:15	Recreation Opportunities and Analysis	Mike Cook ORA, USFS, Bankhead
7:45	Liaison Panel Evaluation	Dave Casey District Ranger
8:15	Closeout Next meeting & agenda items Other panel business items	Dave Casey, District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
8:30	Adjourn	

**Bankhead National Forest
Liaison Panel
Meeting Summary
Moulton Rec Center
January 21, 2016**

Forest Service Attendees:

Dave Casey, Bankhead District Ranger
Mike Cook, Bankhead ORA
Allison Cochran, Bankhead Wildlife Biologist
Lorenzo Walton, Bankhead Forester
Paul Gilliland, Bankhead Asst. Fire Management Officer
Andy Scott, Southern Research Station (facilitator)
Rita Patterson, Forestry Technician
Andrew Lambert, TNC Partnership Firefighter

Liaison Panel Members:

James Alexander
Mark Kolinski
Russell Miller
John Howell
Mike Henshaw
Charles Borden
Matt Brock
Anthony Hood
Mike Henshaw
Randy Feltman
Mary Lee Ratliff
Kevin Pugh

Public Attendees:

Janice Barrett	Fred Chiesa
Chris and Karen Hulbert	James Grant
Kevin England	Melica Allen
David Brown	Mike Bagwell
LC Hall	Donald Jones
Patricia Alexander	Edmond Smith
Rae Ramsey	Brandon Bobo
Kent George	James Barnacastle

Agenda

Meeting Facilitator Introduction

Andy Scott

Ground rules review

District Ranger Welcome & Updates & Big Tree Fire Summary

Dave Casey
Mike Cook

- Recognize Laverne Matheson's efforts as a critical member of the panel and community
- WildSouth (Mark and Janice) received Regional Foresters award for volunteerism
- 2015 very big fire year; BNF helped substantially in the West
- Big Tree Fire in the Sipsey Wilderness
- Staff changes on BNF
 - 5 people have recently moved on
 - Plan to hire 3 due to flat or declining budgets
- Accomplishments
 - Houston recreation project, analysis in progress
 - Forest Health project, introducing proposal tonight
 - Lorenzo Walton temporarily assuming Silviculturist (Tripp Gaskins) position
 - Sold over 19,000 ccf in timber sales, mostly forest health thinnings
 - Prescribed burned 20,000 acres
 - Exceeded non-native invasive plant control target
 - Indiana bat project
 - Addressed soil & water issues
 - Owl Creek horse trails received maintenance
 - In addition to Backcountry Horseman maintenance and implemented new trail improvements
 - Mike & staff juggling rec areas with reduced staff

Big Tree Wildfire in Sipsey Wilderness

- Oct 16 – Wildfire discovered by visitors
- Dave, John Garcia, Mike hiked to fire in dark, center of Sipsey
- 22 acres upon discovery, potential 100+ acres
- Day 2
 - 6 personnel
 - Jumped 223 Bunyan Hill Trail
 - 55 acres
 - Drought conditions, unable to control with current resources
- Day 3
 - More forces coming in to aid in suppression
 - 162 acres, concern for medical emergencies
 - Leaf blowers not working to control/contain the fire
 - Reevaluate strategy and tactics
- New strategy
 - Reduce exposure of firefighters
 - Protect Big Tree
 - Minimize suppression impacts to wilderness (Minimum Impact Suppression Techniques)
 - Keep within the "box"
 - Minimize fire intensity
- "Box"
 - Use trails & streambeds for containment and burn out operations
 - North of Sipsey Fork

- East of Bee Branch
- South of NW 208
- West of Brazil Creek
- MIST
 - Minimal impact suppression tactics
 - Streams & trails
 - Leaf blowers, not digging fire control lines
 - Minimal chainsaw use
 - Remove flagging, trash, etc.
 - Flights, visual & audio minimized
- Type III Incident Management Team & additional resources on Monday
 - Implement strategy
 - Allow District personnel to do other initial attack
 - Logistical support
 - Financial responsibilities
 - Meet information needs
 - Up to 76 people at one time working on the fire
- Incident Command
 - READ (Resource Advisor) was used to protect Wilderness quality
 - WildSouth important to clear visitors from trails
- Final Report
 - No serious injuries
 - Big Tree protected
 - MIST tactics left wilderness cleaner
 - Contained within box
 - Minimal intensities to hardwoods
- EMT, UTV protocols, even helped public medical emergency
- Growth in partnerships
 - Backcountry Horsemen, Sipsey Wilderness Hiking Club, WildSouth
- Trail closures something new
 - Sipsey Wilderness Hiking Club and WildSouth helped
- Education about fire
 - Public meeting
- Could have been lightning. Cause is undetermined.

Borden: Is AAMU doing a research program on impact?

Mike: Not at this time, will look at scorch heights, intensities, monitor vegetation
Suggest to Callie Schweitzer

Hood: Did fire go above Braziel Creek?
No, did some burning

Mark: BNF did great job, no impacts, etc. Very impressed

**Forest Health & Restoration Projects & Stewardship Proposal Lorenzo Walton Allison Cochran
Dave Casey**

Lorenzo Walton

- Houston LL Restoration EA
- Bankhead 2016 Forest Health CE (Farm Bill)
- Stewardship Proposal

Houston Longleaf Restoration Project

- Area 3 – Longleaf Pine Emphasis Area, similar to Greater Collier EA regarding proposed treatments

- Address need for longleaf restoration and quail habitat
- High focus on understory
- First Thinning – loblolly pine stands
- Intermediate thinning in pine and oak stands – longleaf and oak woodlands and hardwood forest DFC's
- Regeneration - Clearcut with reserves. Loblolly stands being restored to longleaf pine (max ~60 ac stand size)
- Midstory/Understory treatments, 1243 acres
- Pre-commercial thinning young longleaf pine stands
- Glade restorations
- Improve & create wildlife openings
- Timeline: Draft by mid-February. Decision by early summer. Implement by late summer.

Bankhead Forest Health

- 2014 Farm Bill amended Healthy Forest Restoration Act. Provides a new Categorical Exclusion for insect & disease projects
- Bankhead National Forest identified for threat from southern pine beetle and hemlock woolly adelgid
- Project Proposal – 2016 Forest Health Project - Identify overstocked, unthinned pine stands, verify pine still present, commercial thin starting on south end of District. Thin to 60-80 ft²/ac basal area.
- MK: Will these be Type 31 Loblolly? Could be other pine. At least 70% pine to be classified as a pine stand.
- LW: Asking for input from group and public. Collaboration is required for this project.
- Two areas to be considered in Area 1, the hardwood emphasis area. One of those is in the Flint Creek Botanical Area. One area to be considered is in Area 3, the longleaf emphasis area.
- MK: Will stands be thinned around hardwood inclusions or thinned through them?
 - LW: maybe take out, maybe thin at higher BA.
- MH: 60-80 BA; On Hwy 33, the areas thinned, were those 60-80?
 - Probably ~50 BA

Stewardship Proposal – Allison Cochran

- Separate from NEPA analysis; Forest Health will go on regardless of whether a stewardship proposal goes forward or not. Stewardship proposal process will occur parallel to the NEPA analysis for the Forest Health 2016 project.
- Stewardship Overview. Allows Forest Service to implement Forest Plans and restore healthy forests, while working with communities. Goods for Services. Unique features - multiple projects, focus on end result, collaborative
- Identify where, what, etc. to include in the stewardship proposal. Will include the Forest Health Pine Thinnings. Need ideas from group on types of projects and scope. BNF wide? Watersheds? Scope? Type of projects?
- MH: don't see disadvantage of district-wide
- Brandon: what kind of driving project (agreement, service contract, timber contract)? Wide open at this time. Any non-federal match? No.
- Benefits to watershed: may be possible to include other ownerships within watershed, can match non-federal work under Wyden Amendment
- Borden: seems like watershed would focus attention, maybe better for limited personnel
- MK: maybe emphasis areas instead of watershed. Don't want to see Area 1 timber receipts going to do Area 2 or 3 area work. Area 1 has received least attention recently, wants action in Area 1
- Borden: harvest needed to do work, puts emphasis on harvest
- Need full ideas to put in proposal, ideas for partnerships, grants, etc. ****Send email to participants****
- Randy: area in Area 1

Next steps (Dave)

- Tapping the Brakes with our analysis for future timber sales and restoration. We have some time to look at goals, what makes us unique, set priorities. Want to best use limited resources.
- Interested in process for determining directions
- Get a new Silviculturist on board. Take a critical look at our next steps.
- Evaluate goals, goals for Area 1, etc. EIS created areas, after hard-fought effort.
 - Build on that effort
 - Get more specific, specific DFCs, not cookie-cutter
- Randy: we're doing this for wildlife. Less than 1 deer per 1500 acres. Kevin Pugh: About 3300 permits issued on WMA, only 6 does harvested. Concern for game animals.
 - Dave: is our goal to improve deer habitat? Good ideas to help determine what we want.
 - Borden: in 2004 discussion of wildlife habitat as major emphasis

Recreation Opportunities and Analysis

Mike Cook

Recreation Opportunities & Analysis – Mike Cook

Mike Cook provided an overview of the current Bankhead recreation program/opportunities.

- Smith Lake developed sites
 - Clear Creek, Corinth, Houston
 - Can Houston be maintained?
- Brushy Lake
- Natural Bridge Picnic Area
- Hurricane Creek Shooting Range
- Sipsey Rec Area
- Sipsey Wilderness
- Owl Creek Trail system; non-motorized
- Flint Creek Trail system; motorized use <50”
 - Needs much more maintenance
- Dispersed Uses
- Recreation Analysis – What will be the future of recreation opportunities on Bankhead? Establish a conversation. Prioritize a 2017 Plan of Action. Goal – Use our limited resources as well as possible.
- Challenges: user preferences, people changes, staffing and budget declines
 - Need to identify BNF recreation, uniqueness, etc.
 - Need conversation with Panel and visitors
 - Can't provide current, let alone more to standard, even with partners
 - Demand and uses will likely increase
 - Plan of Action in 2017
 - Identify new partners
 - Not a discussion for “closing things”, but could result in that
 - Dave wants to create a “Working Group” that could have more rec users
 - Present proposals to WG, let WG present to panel, etc.
 - Have representation on panel
 - Talking to UA Trails Commission on statewide offering
 - Talking to National Forest Foundation
 - Anticipate ~1 yr to complete analysis
 - Request to panel, identify folks over 3 months, present at next panel
 - Ensure “quiet” voices heard
 - Borden: concurs
 - Mark: need more than quarterly meetings

Panel Discussion-

- Dave really values Liaison Panel. Panel not negotiable issue
- Question: is Panel getting what they want, how they want it, frequency, field trips, etc.?
- Not as concerned with charter, but want to ensure panel experience is positive
- Pulse check
- Borden: beneficial, educational, enjoyed interactions with FS
 - Quarterly good
 - Opportunities to ask for specific information, good
- Membership: several folks not attending, some proposals for replacements
- Interested in panel observing itself, asking feedback from quieter members
- Q: information format, timing, field trips, more/less info, newsletter, group tasks
- Goal: enjoy panel involvement. Panel critical to District
- Anybody want to lead an effort?
 - Borden: most are willing to speak up, don't think any members not being heard
- Mark: like presentations, oral, don't want email, asking questions.
- Borden: experts good, herpetologist, etc., research
 - Future rec demands, dispersed rec
- Hood: how do I put my name in the hat for rec working group
- Mark: diversify membership. Stakeholders who don't realize it. Local communities don't know enough to realize it. County commissioners should be on, but quit coming to meetings
- Lisa Gardner identified for AAMU representative/research community
- Borden: Anna Mullican, Oakville Indian Mound, request to panel to ask

Closeout

Dave Casey

New members: Kevin Pugh new ADCNR biologist on panel, Matt Brock has a new position as private lands biologist with the AL Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

New member from Smith Lake Advocacy, will be discussed at Smith Lake meeting

State of the Lake: 90-100 attendees. SERVED food and got great participation.

Action Items

Stewardship Proposal

Recreation Working Group

Panel Membership

***Copies of power point presentations presented at this meeting are available by contacting Allison Cochran at the Bankhead National Forest, 205-489-5111.