

Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel Meeting Summary

July 26, 2018

**Bankhead National Forest  
Liaison Panel  
Meeting Agenda  
Moulton Rec Center  
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<b>6:00</b>	<b>Ranger Welcome, Updates and Intro</b> Ground rules review	<b>Andy Scott</b> District Ranger, USFS Bankhead
<b>6:15</b>	<b>Southern Pine Beetle and Timber Sale Program</b> Active Timber Sales 2019 Timber Sale Program SPB Flights	<b>Blake Addison</b> TMA, USFS, Bankhead
<b>6:45</b>	<b>2019 SPB Mitigation and Restoration Proposal</b>	<b>Jason Harris</b> Silviculturist, USFS, Bankhead
<b>7:15</b>	<b>Bankhead NF Updates</b> Prescribed Burning, Tree Planting, Engineering, Wildlife Updates	<b>Andy Scott</b> District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
<b>7:30</b>	<b>Question and Answer</b>	<b>Andy Scott</b>
<b>8:00</b>	<b>Closeout &amp; Adjourn</b> Next meeting & agenda items Other panel business items	<b>Andy Scott</b>

Liaison Panel Members in attendance:

John Howell, James Barnacastle, Kevin Pugh, Anthony Hood, Mike Henshaw, Mark Kolinski

Forest Service staff in attendance:

Blake Addison, Andy Scott, Jason Harris, Shane Hoskins, Allison Cochran

Others in attendance:

Janice Barrett, John Montgomery, Wayne White, Patsy White, Vince Meleski, Donna Shanklin, Mike Bagwell, Rickie Garnder, John Allen

Blake Addison (TMA) gave an update on current timber sales, and amount of logging compared to previous years, and an update on the Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) situation. We've had some social media concerns about perceived increased logging, but Blake showed that those perceptions are likely due to more visible logging locations near major roads, shorter contracts, and loggers waiting until now on their longer contracts. Our sale acres from 2017-2019 will remain +/- 100 acres (~1000 ac/yr). The type of logging is changing, as our 2019 sales will almost all be restoration cuts compared to thinnings as a result of SPB sales. Based on flights that the Forest Health Program of the US Forest Service have conducted, we are seeing a little decrease in SPB activity. We are currently ground-truthing the SPB spots identified by Forest Health in their 2018 flight. There is some overlap between the spots identified in 2017 and 2018 flights for SPB reconnaissance. Timber sales that are planned for the upcoming year that have or are near SPB activity include Balls Mountain, Jim Brown, Wolf Pen and Dry Hollow. All SPB sales to date have been clear cuts. All stands will be clearcut and all loblolly pine will be removed, while merchantable hardwoods will be retained. There was a question on where these sales are located, the Dry Hollow Sale is within the Flannigan Creek Drainage. All of the sales, with the exception of Natural Bridge, are within the Black Warrior Wildlife Management Area.

Additionally, there is an area of standing beetle killed timber along the Byler Road in the Beulah Area. About ½ mile of road has standing dead timber along it and is a hazard. We propose to conduct a hazard tree removal project in that area by mulching, felling, or grinding the dead trees and are working on a Categorical Exclusion at this time.

Jason Harris (Silviculturist) introduced a new project, the 2019 SPB Mitigation and Restoration Project, a new Categorical Exclusion. This project will have options to thin or restore at-risk loblolly pine and mixed pine/hardwood stands based on site conditions and relative susceptibility. Comments were largely about considering the stands in a landscape context and being thoughtful with which stands to treat and how to treat them. No concerns were shared, and a few people specifically expressed support for the efforts to address the forest health issue and create more early successional habitat.

Andy Scott (Ranger) gave updates on a number of projects. The Lee Creek project is an aquatic organism project to replace the crossing at Lee Creek. This project is in the planning stages. An uncommon fish, the flame chub, is found at this site. The project will alleviate road flooding issues and allow for fish and other aquatic organisms to move up and down stream freely.

Andy introduced the new ORA, Shane Hoskins. He also informed the group of other new employees we have hired including Derek Barber, a seasonal timber marker and seasonal firefighter, Stephen White, a new timber marker and Dustin Rolan, an Auburn University intern and wildlife student. We expect to hire a lead timber marker and a fire engine captain in the coming months.

There was a question about the use of contract timber marking. Instead of contracting timber marking this year, we have brought in timber markers from other National Forests in Alabama units.

Andy gave an update on the fire program. We planned to prescribed burn about 20,000 acres this year and have burned about 19,000 acres at this time. About 3,500 of those acres were burned during the growing season. We plan to burn about 500 acres this summer and fall for site preparation for planting shortleaf pine. In 2019, our prescribed burning program includes burning about 22,000 acres with about 3,000 of those acres to be burned in the growing season. We had one wildfire in the Sipsey Wilderness Area in March that was about 30 acres in size. Otherwise, we've only had a few small spot wildfires here and there on the District that burned themselves out.

In the silviculture program in 2018, we planted 162 acres of shortleaf pine this year and 114 acres of longleaf pine.

In the wildlife program of note this year is an experimental planting of a pollinator habitat. If this is successful, we may expand it to other areas in future years. On the Wildlife Management Area, many additional acres of wildlife openings were planted by the Alabama DCNR, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries. Kevin Pugh reported that in very large openings, they are planting only portions of the openings in the spring and then other portions in the fall. Doing this will provide for more diversity and summer habitat. Thirty-four openings, or about 60 acres, were planted this spring by the state. The Forest Service planted a handful of spring openings, as well. The WMA biologist and staff also conducted a turkey production survey this year and saw turkeys at all sites, except one. There were poult on about half of the surveyed sites. Feral swine were only observed on one site which is a major improvement and a result of our feral swine control efforts. The next liaison panel meeting will include an update on feral swine management in the Bankhead. It was noted there is an on-going need for public education on the feral swine issue. The wildlife program biologists continue to conduct surveys and monitoring, including bird point count surveys in spring.

In engineering, the road contract for grading and ditching is active. The Counties are treating co-op roads with Secure Rural Schools Act funds. Forest Service Road 254 is still closed due to a failed culvert.

In recreation, the staff continues to maintain existing sites and make improvements at the Owl Creek trail system. There is an issue at the Caney Creek Falls. This area is not an official, or designated trail, just a social trail, and the road has no parking. The area where people park is on private land with a right-of-way and can accommodate about 3 cars. This spring there were over 50 cars parked on County Road 2 and in the right-of-way causing issues for the neighbors and County Sheriff. Andy and staff will be looking at this issue of a popular waterfall with limited parking and no designated trail. The Houston

Recreation Area continues to be closed to camping, as it has been for a number of years. There is a potential to open it back up in a different format and more information will be brought to the public at a later date. The Sipsey Picnic Area trail has sloughed off and needs work. This is another area that needs attention, as it is not a designated, or official trail. There was discussion on closures, for example the rappelling closure on Borden cannot be enforced as it stands currently. There was an article in the Northwest Alabamian stating the Caney Creek Falls area is closed. It is not closed, but the public is advised to use caution due to logging and dead trees. There are other social trail issues, like Sougahogdee and many of these will be reviewed and discussed at future meetings.

There were questions about invasive animals and other pests, like emerald ash borer and hemlock wooly adelgid. Bankhead is monitoring, especially with HWA. Models suggest it might be 2020-2024 before it arrives in our area. It was brought up that we need more HWA monitoring locations in the northwest and northeast corners of Bankhead, as that is likely where it will arrive if it arrives with a wind event. Moving firewood is a concern with EAB, especially at large events like Nascar and college football games.

Mike Wetzal, reporter with the Decatur Daily, came and interviewed Jason and Blake for a story that should come out electronically Saturday and in the Sunday paper this week.

Copies of power point presentations that were shared at this meeting are available by contacting Allison Cochran at [jera.cochran@usda.gov](mailto:jera.cochran@usda.gov).