

Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel Meeting Summary – October 29, 2019

**Bankhead National Forest Liaison Panel
Meeting Agenda
First National Bank, Double Springs, AL
October 29, 2019**

Theme: Terrestrial Habitat Management

6:00	Ranger Welcome, Updates and Intro Ground rules review	Andy Scott District Ranger, USFS Bankhead
6:05	NEPA Vegetation Management Projects Update 2019 SPB Restoration & Mitigation, Longleaf Challenge	Jason Harris Silviculturist, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	Vegetation Management with Herbicides	Jason Harris USFS, Bankhead
6:30	2019 and 2020 Timber Sale Program	Paul Richards, Sale Layout USFS, Bankhead
6:45	2020 Prescribed Burning Program	Kerry Clark Fire Management Officer, USFS, Bankhead
7:00	Glade Restoration Update	Allison Cochran Wildlife Biologist, USFS, Bankhead
7:15	Question and Answer	Andy Scott
7:30	Closeout & Adjourn Next meeting & agenda items Other panel business items	Andy Scott



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Meeting Summary –

Liaison Panel Members in Attendance: Anthony Hood, John Howell, Mark Kolinski, Chuck Byrd, Randy Feltman, Kevin Pugh, Daryl Lawson

Forest Service staff in Attendance: Andy Scott, Shane Hoskins, Jason Harris, Allison Cochran, Paul Richards, Kerry Clark, Gaylon McGraw, Stephen White.

Interested members of the public in attendance: Nick Sharp, Kim Waites, Robert Howell, Roger Robertson, Andrew Shea, Janice Barrett, Levi Brown, Frank Barker, Mike Bagwell

District Ranger Andy Scott opened the meeting and introduced his idea to encourage more participation in the liaison panel meetings with a wider audience by making the meetings more thematic and focused on similar topics. The goal is good communication with larger audiences. He welcomes input on themes and topics. Andy gave some general updates. The National Forests in Alabama has a new Forest Supervisor in Montgomery, Cherie Hamilton, who was most recently the Forest Supervisor in Arkansas, has served the agency in many roles, and started out as a soil scientist. Bankhead has filled the biologist vacancy Travis McDonald left by hiring Rollins Jolly who comes to us from the US Army. We are hiring a few temporary seasonal employees in Recreation and in Fire, Sky Congleton is on board in rec and Valerie Knurr will arrive soon. Andy has been working through the “Fire Hire” process a national fire hiring process and we have a tentative appointment on Bankhead for a new Fire Apprentice, filling the position that Krystal Reddy recently vacated. The Nature Conservancy has hired a fire seasonal who will be stationed at Bankhead through an agreement. And we are working on hiring a new Student Conservation Association Fire and Rec intern. Andy shared the reminder that hunting season is opening soon and thanked Kevin Pugh for working to bring early hunts to Black Warrior. Kevin moved some hunts into early November to coincide better with rut and breeding activity and reduced some later season hunts. The Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries has also placed a freezer at the Bankhead District Office in Double Springs for collection of deer heads for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) sampling. While CWD is not known from Alabama, the Division is actively monitoring throughout the state and encourages hunters to participate in the surveillance effort by testing as many deer as possible. The results are being returned to hunters very quickly, likely much quicker than someone would pick up their meat from a processor. Andy also shared that this is Bat Week, that Bankhead is hosting the Southeastern Bat Diversity Network’s Bat Blitz in August and this weekend is the Alabama Partnership for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation meeting at Camp McDowell.

Silviculturist Jason Harris presented an update on the 2019 Southern Pine Beetle (SPB) Mitigation and Restoration Project. A decision memo is being prepared for the project and is expected to be signed in November. This project addresses stands susceptible to Southern Pine Beetle infestation, over-stocked, off-site loblolly pine stands. Most of the project focus is in Area One. The project proposal includes thinning about 1200 acres and clear-cutting about 600 acres, although provisions exist for modifying some of the thinning to clearcutting if southern pine beetle activity increases and threatens priority stands. Stands will be restored to upland hardwoods, shortleaf pine woodlands, or mixed shortleaf-oak forests and woodlands.

Jason Harris gave an update on a new project proposal that is part of the America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative and the Forest Service Million Acre Longleaf Challenge. Pine stands in Area 3, Bankhead’s longleaf emphasis area, will be inventoried and considered for ways to restore longleaf pine woodlands by a variety of methods, including clear-cutting, thinning, midstory removal, prescribed burning and treating non-native invasive species to restore understory vegetation.

Jason Harris discussed an issue with a contract for site preparation and non-native invasive plant spraying that occurred in 2018. An herbicide application contract treated about 400 acres in 2018 and the results were not desirable and did not achieve our objectives. Overstory hardwoods including oaks and hickories meant for retention were killed. Imazapyr is a soil active herbicide that was used and caused the negative effects. A perfect storm of issues occurred due to several factors,

weather, oversaturation, chemical separation, proximity of imazapyr use to overstory hardwoods, etc. District staff reviewed the sites throughout the summer and monitored for mortality. All trees may not be dead, some may just be stunted. Monitoring will continue into the next growing season at these sites. Once discovered in 2019, no imazapyr was used for any vegetation management while staff was learning and understanding what happened and planning a remedy for future applications to meet desirable outcome. In the future, several actions will occur when using herbicide for vegetation management. There will be increased monitoring of imazapyr used around desired leave trees. Contractors and staff will not change chemicals between treatment units until the unit is completed. We will ensure better documentation of entry dates and treatments. We will ensure the contract plainly states the desired results and that contractors understand the desired outcome. Proper equipment cleaning and agitation will be required and monitored. Triclopyr was used for the midstory removal portion of the contract and no negative effects were observed. Again, this led to the conclusion that the issue was with imazapyr in this contract, oversaturation due to retreatment, and treatment under the drip line of desired hardwood retention trees. Ranger Andy Scott emphasized that we hope some of the trees survive, but that does not change the fact that as soon as we observed the issue, we stopped to figure out what occurred and how to correct it. There were a few questions and concerns raised including how much chemical was used and in what concentrations and application rates. There was a question about the application method and equipment. Backpack sprayers were used, although a large tank mix was also used leading to issues with agitation and separation and equipment cleaning. There were questions about whether we had used these chemicals successfully in the past. We have used glyphosate, imazapyr, and triclopyr successfully in the past and we have used these same contractors in the past with satisfactory results. This was nothing new, treatment wise. There was a question about the temperature and if volatilization could have occurred. That is a possibility in a few stands, but not many. There were questions and discussion about soil movement due to rain. Soil type can affect that movement. There were questions about whether water quality was tested and concerns about effects to aquatic and soil organisms. As it was months after the application that we discovered the issue, water quality monitoring would not have shown us anything. However, these were upland sites and no vegetation outside of the stands was impacted, so there is no evidence that run off to a stream occurred. Streamside management zones are in place at all sites. The chemicals used work on plant specific hormones. There is not a similar pathway in insects and animals. There was a concern about the use of glyphosate and the health of workers. There is a concern about the use of imazapyr around hardwoods. Are there alternatives available? Yes, there are alternatives, but glyphosate and imazapyr achieve the best control for site preparation for the price. Panel members encouraged us to be very conservative in the future and use this as a cautionary tale, as there was much push back to using herbicides when we began restoration efforts.

Timber Sale Layout Forestry Technician Paul Richards shared a presentation on the timber sale and restoration program. In 2019, about 1,000 acres were included in four timber sales. The Jim Brown, Wolf Pen and Balls Mountain sales are all restoration clear-cuts of off-site overstocked loblolly pine. The goal is to reduce the potential for southern pine beetle infestation in these stands. The Corinth Timber Sale is a longleaf pine project that is part of the Houston Environmental Assessment. It includes thinning and longleaf pine restoration. The sale is within the Corinth Recreational Area and adjacent areas. In 2020, there are four timber sales proposed on about 1,000 acres. The Dry Hollow and Natural Bridge timber sales are clear-cuts of off-site overstocked loblolly pine. The goal is to reduce the potential for southern pine beetle (SPB) infestation. The Flint Creek and Flat Mountain timber sales are pine thinnings to improve forest health and reduce the SPB potential. Paul shared a vicinity map of the 2020 proposed timber sales. There were questions about the locations, including within the Flint Creek ATV trail area and the Flint Creek Botanical Area. Flat Mountain and Flint Creek sales are in these areas. Maps of proposed timber sales are available upon request. There were questions about hardwoods being removed in these areas with desired future condition (DFC) of upland hardwood. Some hardwoods may be removed to facilitate logging and to release desirable advanced hardwood regeneration. There was a question on whether thinning to a target of 70 ft² basal area in hardwood DFC areas is sufficient to allow enough light for advanced regeneration to succeed. Have we completed advanced regeneration sampling? Yes.

Fire Management Officer Kerry Clark shared a presentation on the 2019 and 2020 fire program on Bankhead. In 2019, two burns were completed using helicopter aerial ignitions. All others were ignited by hand crews on the ground. In the past, we used a power torch mounted on ATV to facilitate prescribed burning. Due to accidents and a death, we lost that tool.

Ignitions from helicopters have been used for about the past ten years in Alabama. However, due to some lost lives with aerial ignitions due to helicopter crashes, we are looking for alternatives for ignition methods. In 2020, we plan to use less aviation and more UTV mounted power torches. Kerry reviewed the amount of Bankhead that is managed with prescribed burning. Sixty-two percent of the Bankhead is unburned forest, not managed with fire. Of the total Bankhead acres, 23% of the Forest is in long rotation burns and 15% of the Forest is in short rotation burns. The objectives in long rotation burns include fuel reduction, promoting oak reproduction, and improving wildlife habitat. In the short rotation burns, the objectives include fuel reduction, promoting planned shortleaf, longleaf and oak woodland and native bluestem understory in uplands and improving wildlife habitat. In 2019, we burned 17,466 acres. Of that, 4,073 acres were included in growing season burns. We are limited to what we can burn in the growing season because of so few days with good burning conditions and days in prescription. We are focusing on longleaf and shortleaf pine woodland restoration areas with our growing season burning. Also, in 2019, we burned 95 acres to prepare sites for planting shortleaf pine in winter 2020. In 2019, there were nine wildfires on 807 acres. One was caused by a vehicle fire and one was caused by debris burning that escaped onto Forest Service lands. The largest fire was 327 acres and it was caused by lightning. The remaining six fires were unknown human caused fires, likely arson. A map of the 2019 and 2020 prescribed burn program was shared. It will be available online this year at the National Forests in Alabama's webpage. Visitors and neighbors are encouraged to follow the NFs in AL social media for timely updates on prescribed burning activities.

Wildlife Biologist Allison Cochran gave a presentation on restoration and management of glades and rock outcrops, a rare plant community on Bankhead. She described and showed pictures of glades and rock outcrops on Bankhead and the unique and rich flora associated with glades. An endangered plant, the fleshy-fruit gladecress, occurs on one limestone glade on Bankhead and it is under active management to control illegal riding and dumping and to kill and remove non-native and native encroaching vegetation. Allison described Forest Plan direction related to rare community conservation and our glade conservation and management activities. On November 23, a glade work day with partners at Wild South and the University of Alabama is planned at the Corinth glade. Removing privet will be the focus of that work day. Please contact Janice Barrett at Wild South or Allison at Bankhead if you would like to participate or learn more. There was discussion on dumping and littering and illegal riding and what is done to address that. There was discussion on the use of prescribed burning and glade management and what success or lack of success we have had with burning on glades. Fuels and moisture are limiting factors when burning glades. There was question about areas of limestone boulders and whether those are considered glades. Chuck Byrd with TNC and Allison shared information about the range and types of "glade complexes." Limestone boulder fields in the Tennessee Valley were historically grasslands and cedar has encroached these areas. Visit the Southeastern Grasslands Initiative to learn more. Also visit the TNC managed glades throughout Alabama, including in Lawrence County at Prairie Grove Glades. These include limestone "pavement" glade, but also cedar woodlands and grasses, all part of the glade complex. There was a question on how you determine if a glade is limestone or sandstone, as both occur on Bankhead. Soil maps, texture, look, vegetation present, etc. are ways to make that distinction.

Ranger Andy Scott concluded the meeting with a few comments. There was positive support for making the meeting more thematic. Recreation and Wilderness are a theme to come and Kim Waites would like to give a presentation at that meeting on Wild South's work in Sipsey. There is interest in hosting a field trip on Bankhead. Historically a restoration monitoring team, or subcommittee, of the Liaison Panel conducted regular monitoring field trips of restoration areas. While we may not have the capacity to monitor to that level again, there are many who are interested in a field trip to showcase some restoration activities in each DFC or Area. The Forest Service is open to a host of options. Tentatively a field trip on December 17th is planned to look at projects in Area 1 or Area 2. An email will be sent to the mailing list. We need a head count for planning purposes. So, if you forward the information to others, for example at Alabama A&M or University of Alabama, please remind them to let us know they will plan to attend.

Copies of all power point presentations and maps are available by contacting Allison Cochran at jera.cochran@usda.gov.

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