

USFS Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Initiative
LIAISON PANEL AND MONITORING WORK GROUPS

January 8' 2004

Meeting Summary

Community Recreation Center - Moulton, AL

Liaison Panel Members:

Randy Feltman, *Logger and Local Resident*
Mike Henshaw, *Alabama Cooperative Extension Service*
Randall LouAllen, *Lawrence County Commissioner*
Bill Snoddy, *Treasure Forest Landowner*
Faron Weeks, *Warrior Mountain Cultural and Historical Society*
Mary Lee Ratcliff, *Recreational and Trail Interests*

USFS Bankhead National Forest Personnel:

John Creed, *Acting Bankhead District Ranger*
Kathy Wallace
Allison Cochran

Facilitators:

Mary Lou Addor, *Natural Resources Leadership Institute*
Steve Smutko, *Natural Resources Leadership Institute*

Interested People/ Other Attendees:

Mike and Joyce Bagwell, *Landowners*
Robert Hyatt, *not listed*
Anthony Hood, *Timber/Thinning Work Group*
Rory Frazer, *AAMUniveristy*
Ted Kuzma, *Wild Alabama*
Richard Linholm, *not listed*
Sue Sparks, *AAMUniveristy*
Wes Stone, *AAMUniversity*
Athel Wilhite, *Treasure Forest*

January 8, 2004 Meeting Agenda
5:30pm - 9:00 pm.

5:30pm Open House
5:45pm Welcome/ Orientation
6:10pm USFS Thinning Contract Specifications
6:45pm Proposal: Science and Research Interface
7:15pm Meet Someone New
7:45pm Monitoring Groups Protocols Next Steps for Liaison Panel
9:00pm Next Steps
9:15pm Adjourn

January 8th Handouts Provided

- December 2, 2003 Meeting Summary.
- USFS Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative Thinning Contract Specifications and site maps.
- Proposal: National Science Foundation Proposal.
- Updated Monitoring Work Groups Contact and Description Information.
- Example of a Monitoring Effort in Montana: Collaboration for Community and Forest Well-Being in the Upper Swan Valley, Montana

KEY POINTS/NEXT MEETING DATES AND PURPOSE:

- **USFS Personnel affirmed the need to have multi-party monitoring work groups** to monitor forest health and restoration activities and confirm whether or not the USFS is performing what it agreed to do and how. Methods to accomplish monitoring efforts are being explored through the Thinning/Timber Monitoring Work Group as well as other Monitoring Work Groups.
- **USFS Personnel affirmed the need to maintain the Liaison Panel** as an important means for citizens to engage with each other and the USFS on issues surrounding management of the Bankhead National Forest. *How this occurs* (meet quarterly, involve new people, set up new meeting procedures, etc...) is still open to discussion.
- **Field Trip: Timber and Thinning Monitoring Work Group: March 9, 2004 @ 10:00am** - meet at the USFS District Ranger Office in Double Springs, Ala and carpool from district office to the various field trip sites. An ending time is not scheduled to allow participants to take the time needed to cover the following objectives. A participant may want to drive his or her vehicle if they cannot stay the entire time. Field Trip Objectives:
 - Review and discuss the first forest health thinning work that has been prepared on the ground.
 - View current sites for thinning and timber sales and prescribed burn areas.
 - Develop a better understanding of monitoring work group expectations and examples of how to achieve these.
 - Encourage attendance by anyone who has an interest in the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative to join this group on March 9, 2004.
- **Meeting/Field Trip: Liaison Panel and Multiparty Work Groups will meet - Saturday, March 20, 2004 for a field trip, lunch, and an afternoon meeting.**
 - **Field Trip: 8am -10:30am**, anyone interested in visiting the initial thinning sites and view prescribed burn areas in the Bankhead will meet at the USFS District Ranger Office in Double Springs, Ala at 8:00am. The field trip will be completed in time for lunch that precedes the Liaison Panel and Monitoring Group Meeting.
 - **Lunch: 11:00am -12:00pm:** at Traders and Farmers Bank Building, Double Springs, Ala.
 - **Meeting: 12:00pm-3:00pm:** at Traders and Farmers Bank Building, Double Springs, Ala.March 20th Objectives:
 - Bankhead National Forest Update: Glen Gaines
 - Clarify the roles/responsibilities/commitments of the Forest Health/Restoration Monitoring Groups (Vince Meleski and Mike Henshaw)
 - Develop a broad action plan for discussion of future topics/projects for the Liaison Panel. **Liaison Panel members to email topics for consideration by March 12th to Mary Lou.**
 - Encourage attendance by anyone who has an interest in the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative to join the field trip and meeting.

Format Key:

Questions (Q), Responses (R) Comment (C), Liaison Panel (LP), Monitoring Group (MG), Forest Service (FS)

I. WELCOME/MEETING ORIENTATION

A. Welcome

1. Mary Lou Addor and Steve Smutko (Natural Resources Leadership Institute), introduced themselves, welcomed the Liaison Panel and Monitoring Group members and other guests present. Those in attendance also introduced themselves.

2. Mary Lou went over the purpose of the meeting. She also provided a brief explanation of the handouts distributed at the meeting.

B. Meeting Objectives

1. Encourage attendance of interested individuals in the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.
2. Encourage meeting someone new and learning about his or her respective interests in the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.
3. Develop a better understanding about the use of the USFS Contract Specifications for Thinning and Timber Sales.
4. Discuss current National Science Foundation research proposal from AAMUniveristy regarding the interfacing of science and research into the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.
5. Discuss proposed next steps for Monitoring Work Groups and Liaison Panel: what seems reasonable? What is achievable? What does not?

C. Review of December 8 Meeting Summary

1. Meeting Summary approved without changes and posted on the NRLI website at:
www.ces.ncsu.edu/nrli/bankhead.html

II. UPDATES: STATUS OF BANKHEAD FOREST HEALTH AND RESTORATION PROJECT/John Creed

A. Update on Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Project

1. Status - completed the NEPA process - no appeals on the forest health and restoration initiative.

Q: Are appeals common?

R: The FS had one plan in litigation in the 80's and early 90's and other appeals in the region shut down timber projects in the region. Therefore, there has been a period where appeals have been more common. Because of not having an appeal - the FS can move forward with the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative as outline in the EIS.

2. In order to move with the Health and Restoration Initiative, activities as specified are required to be carried out. The hands-on monitoring program will assist in making sure this happens.
3. The bid process for timber sales is expected to open/close in March.

B. Use of Bankhead Forest Service Stand Prescriptions for the Monitoring Program.

1. Use of Existing Specifications/Guidelines: At the December meeting - some members suggested using the forest service stand prescriptions as guidelines to assist the monitoring work group in the monitoring progress.
2. Forest Service Checklists/Contract Specifications: John Creed distributed a packet of handouts that included:
 - a. Timber Sale Inspection Report Handout: this report serves as a checklist of items for Forest Service personnel during timber sales. A contract provision addresses each of the items on the

timber sale inspection report. Contract specifications can vary for each sale, based on that site's particular variance and other factors.

- b. Stand Prescriptions and site maps for compartments #148, 157, 159, 163, 164, 32, 15, 16, 17, 68, 92, and 124. Handouts were distributed on Pine Restoration Prescription for area 2 and 3.
 - c. The Timber Sale Inspection Report and the Stand Prescriptions could serve to provide a useful checklist template for the thinning/timber-monitoring group. In addition, templates developed for the timber and thinning work group may serve as a checklist template for the other monitoring groups as well.
 - d. The other handouts in package are the pine restoration stand prescriptions and maps.
3. Resources for Monitoring Program/Liaison Panel: FS currently has enough funds to cover Forest Service monitoring needs required by the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), state laws, and revised management plan. If additional funds are required - the Liaison Panel and/or Monitoring Work Groups may want to pursue their own resources.

One way to determine future resource needs is for each monitoring group to develop a plan of action that includes resources needed to implement the plan of action. This may help determine overall resources necessary to carry out the 5-year monitoring program to coincide with the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.

Q: What kinds of monitoring will the USFS undertake during the upcoming thinning projects?

R: Kinds of Monitoring:

- Bat monitoring: mist-netting in Forest; harp trapping in caves; hibernacula surveys every other year; and cave surveys (preservation of endangered bats);
- Flattened Musk Turtle: UAB and the Nature Conservancy;
- White Tailed Deer Spotlight Survey;
- White Tailed Deer/Wild Turkey Harvest Data;
- Snail Surveys;
- Bird Count Surveys;
- Site Specific- plant and animal surveys;
- Feral Hog Impact Study;
- Photo monitoring for prescribed burning areas;
- Rush Darter Monitoring Study: Auburn University; and
- Butterfly Survey.

R: Monitoring Process:

- site visits;
- pictures;
- observation checklists;
- surveys;
- studies;
- maps indicating baseline features and then changes; and
- Alabama A&M University is proposing a comprehensive proposal for a major monitoring program on the forest.

C: Efforts for concurrence on baseline data is essential in all monitoring efforts. And as the project and other activities move forward – concurrence is needed on those activities as well.

C: On the pine site restoration, the FS is going to end up with fewer acres on the ground than what is shown in document. The other thing missing is the hardwood treatment. FS has outlined a group of stands for this year but there are several sites yet to map out. Once completed – this information will be distributed to the group. The FS may receive enough funding to thin all the acres however stands are currently being prioritized based on the most efficient and effective to thin in order to meet FS objectives. The FS has carefully mapped out the areas to be thinned so timber crews will thin exactly where they should.

Q: Regarding the thinning entry years, why is stand 6 and 46 listed together?

R: This is an error - USFS included 46 in here later just so that it would not be missed.

Q: In a given area, who decides the specific trees that will be cut?

R: The marking crews. In a “marked tree cut” we mark the trees to be cut. In “leave tree cut” we mark the trees to be leave. In a “cut by description” – the USFS identifies the species, diameter and height, and other descriptors. Regardless – by law - USFS must identify the trees to be cut – every tress gets a stump mark and eye mark. This decision is not left up to non Forest Service Personnel.

III. Proposal: Integration of Science and Research into the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative– Rory Frazer

1. Center for Forest Ecosystem Assessment (CEFA): Alabama A&M University (AAMU) received accreditation for its forestry program. As a result, AAMU is ready to move to the next level: research. The research niche will be the upland hardwood forests of the southern Cumberland Plateau. Currently, there is an opportunity to submit a proposal to the National Science Foundation (www.nsf.gov). The proposal requests funds to establish a Center for Ecosystem Assessment at AAMU, a center that would be useful to both academia as well as the people in the Bankhead. Although there is no certainty of funding, AAMU is pushing ahead and if awarded – AAMU would hope to work with the Liaison Panel. Project duration will be five years. Goal of the project is to understand the “synergy” in the changes in the forest across the landscape within and between the ecosystem and the social system (see attached CEFA summary proposal).

Forest restoration will be a subject of significant future research and forest management so many people outside Alabama will be interested in learning what is occurring in Alabama.

2. Research Goal of National Science Proposal: to investigate how well the forest health and restoration plan works to reach its goals through 5 subprojects. The project will focus primarily on Area 1 and impacts of the thinning and prescribed burning actions. The idea is to look at the impact of the disturbances (changes) resulting from the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. The 5 subprojects are:
 - *Vegetative Community*: How the vegetation responds to the changes (trees and mid-story vegetation);
 - *Macro-Invertebrate*: Impacts on macro invertebrate (birds specifically) and invertebrate (insect) communities;
 - *Biogeochemical Nutrient Cycling*: Changes to soil and water systems – biochemical and nutrient cycling;
 - *Molecular Biology*: Changes in genetic makeup of biological systems; and

- *Human Dimensions*: How people are impacted by these changes and influence the forest. Specifically interested in how people are responding to and interacting with the new plan.

3. Faculty involved:

- Silviculturalists
- Wildlife biologists
- Etymologists
- Molecular biologists
- Soils scientists
- GIS specialists and policy specialists

4. Anticipated Outcomes:

- Learning by doing – faculty, students and community;
- Developing new and stronger partnerships among and between scientists and the Bankhead community; and
- Collaboration among scientists and community.

5. Liaison Panel Letter of Support:

- Requested a letter of support from the Liaison Panel.
- Letter of support approved by those in attendance. Faron Weeks drafted a letter of support and circulated it to the Liaison Panel members for his or her response. Panel discussed contents of support letter and who should be represented on it. Members in attendance chose to sign letter of support representing themselves and those who submitted their support to Faron Weeks by email. If an email was not received with stating support – support would not be assumed without expressed permission. (see attached for letter of support).

Questions posed to AMMU Researchers - Rory Frazer and Wes Stone as follows:

Q: Are you interested in working with private landowners?

R: Yes. particularly interested in learning how private landowners are responding to what is going on around here. The research efforts will not doing anything prescriptive or corrective since as scientists – the goal is observation, not advocacy nor treatment.

Q: How will AAMU use the conclusions from the study?

R: AAMU will publish and create a web page that will have all the information collected and the analysis undertaken. The project will focus primarily on Area 1 and impacts of the thinning and prescribed burning actions.

Q: Will AAMU include the wilderness area in the study?

R: AAMU will use areas in the Bankhead as control sites, and some of these areas may be in the wilderness area. AAMU is principally interested the effects of the restoration actions, i.e., burning and thinning. AAMU will not study the wilderness per se to see how it is changing over time.

Q: How much money are you asking for?

R: \$5 million.

Q: When will AAMU know whether the proposal is awarded or not?

R: AAMU will know by mid summer results of proposal and if awarded, funding will be available in September. AAMU hopes to collect some baseline data before the USFS starts their work.

Q: Would it be more interesting to answer the question of “is the wilderness good or bad”?

R: AAMU is writing its proposal in order to have a high probability of getting funded. Is the “wilderness area good or bad” – are not types of high priority questions in the research community right now. Restoration, however is an important issue. Since few of these kinds of large events are

occurring – this is good opportunity to observe and measure the impacts of a restoration initiative. If a grant is awarded – AAMU may be able to investigate other questions down the road such as those pertaining to the wilderness, as it attracts additional funding.

IV. Monitoring Group Protocols / Role of Liaison Panel – Mary Lou Addor

At the January meeting and through Steering Committee conference calls and emails, the following information was gathered. There was not enough time during the January meeting to work through the following questions. Prior and during the March meeting – it is expected and hoped that other Liaison Panel will contribute his or her opinions and help in order to assist in determining and implementing next steps.

1. *Does the FS want the Liaison Panel to continue as an entity, engaging local citizenry in providing recommendations regarding forest management?*

The USFS responded positively and firmly about the importance of maintaining the Bankhead Liaison Panel – not only to provide input to the USFS but to act as forum of learning and discussion for the Bankhead community when issues arise or there needs be divergent thinking on how to problem – solve a concern or offer suggestions.

2. *Does this Liaison Panel want to continue to meet as an entity: to ensure the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative is implemented and discuss other topics as needed?*

Members polled thus far would like to see the Liaison Panel continue. The LP provides a forum for discussion and a point of connection and learning within the Bankhead community. The LP allows those who attend to share in solving a problem, to create opportunities for different ways to solve problems, or hear about concerns of one group and how other user groups might be able to assist in working through the issue. The LP also provides an opportunity to hear about FS updates or study updates and general concerns.

Some LP members may want to continue meeting while others may want to rotate off. Only a few LP members attended the January meeting – so it is difficult to surmise who would like to continue working with the Liaison Panel or would prefer to simply step off. Phone calls will be made to determine who would like to stay on the LP or would prefer rotate off, and/or prefer for someone else to take his or her place. Furthermore- some Liaison Panel members are interested in simply being on the Liaison Panel and not a monitoring work group. Moreover, others still may prefer a return to the quarterly meeting sessions instead of the monthly meetings. Request that each LP member email his or her preference by March 12, 2003 to Mary_Addor@ncsu.edu

Topics for future consideration by the Liaison Panel include:

- Road maintenance, access, and decommissioning;
- Property rights / watching over the implementation of the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative to safeguard private property rights over the long run;
- Sustainable development / economic development;
- Expanded horseback riding trail system;
- Anticipate user conflicts in the forest and how to address these;
- Anticipate emerging issues;
- Managing invasive exotic species; and
- Expanding community outreach about the project.

3. *How will the monitoring working groups move forward?*

- a. From a FS perspective – would like to see monitoring work group move forward with the purpose of identifying and confirming what the USFS said it would do and continue the ongoing learning process with community members.
- b. From a community perspective – some of the monitoring group responsibilities identified are:
 - Monitor progress and performance of the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative;
 - Attend meetings/ field trips;
 - Document learnings and monitoring observations;
 - Follow through on action items;
 - Establish operating structure for accountability, follow through, and maintaining a focus on monitoring; and
 - Members may come from Liaison Panel and beyond (anyone interested – come and go).

4. *Who will provide leadership for the monitoring groups? What does leadership look like in this instance?*

- a. Monitoring Work Group leadership Criteria (developed by members in attendance):
 - Can commit the time
 - Experience and knowledge (product knowledge)
 - Interest and willingness to learn
 - Group process skills
 - Willingness to compromise (collaborate)
 - Organized – ability to have a vision, a plan
 - Co-leadership model?
 - Resourceful
 - Divergent thinking
 - Ability to communicate
 - Maintain meeting summaries or notes or checklists.

5. *In general – the following points of concurrence and concern have been expressed about the Liaison Panel from some of the members:*

- 1) **General Points of Concurrence on Liaison Panel Expectations and Format:**
 - Very important to keep Liaison Panel meeting and set a routine (set meeting dates and outline a 5 year plan).
 - Meet quarterly or more frequently if warranted.
 - Provide focus on macro issues in the Bankhead. Deal with other Bankhead issues outside of the restoration initiative.
 - Perhaps serve as discussion forum if a concern or disagreement surfaces within the monitoring groups.
 - Take strong leadership role as a public information tool to share learning and experiences with the local community.
 - Keep together as a sounding board and as means for the community to interface with the management agency.
 - Develop an agenda: a 5 year “squirt-gun” deadline- long-term plan –set tentative agenda for the next plans.
 - Perhaps work with the USFS to hear from regional and national levels on what other districts are doing.
 - Provide opportunities for educational forums.

2) **Points of Concern on Liaison Panel Expectations and Format:**

- May not have membership required to discuss proposed or future topics.
- May be a large turn over in membership.
- The USFS prefers not to guide nor take leadership of the liaison panel or monitoring work groups. The USFS prefers to remain independent of the groups – providing information and expertise where needed and requested – and certainly to do whatever makes sense in support of this most important program. USFS would like to maintain some type of facilitated model during the meetings.

6. *In general – the following points of concurrence and concern expressed about the Monitoring Work Groups were:*

1) **Points of Concurrence on Multiparty Monitoring Work Groups Expectations and Format:**

- subcommittee members or anyone who chooses to – can become involved in monitoring to whatever level they are willing and able to do so.
- Mary Lou will work with the timber/thinning work group as a support person for their efforts. Once this work group is initiated – this may leverage the ability of the other work groups.
- Keep monitoring work groups an open process –those that want to be involved should be and when they want to be. However – determining one's involvement level should not deter the efforts of those participating at a more frequent level. Those who are decide to be involved on a less frequent basis need to take the time to catch up with the efforts of those who are participating more often. It is expected that monitoring group results will be posted on the website, made available on the local library, and through local email.
- Encourage participation into the monitoring groups –keep it an open process so community members know they can be included in the process.
- Perhaps the Monitoring Groups can focus on the micro issues and the Liaison Panel on the macro issues.
- Develop more hands on activities –to encourage learning and participation.
- Once the work groups become more self-sustaining and understand the monitoring work group work load is not that great – the monitoring work groups will initiate the agendas and plan the trips. Work groups can be as informal as needed to be.

2) **Points of Concern on Multiparty Monitoring Work Groups Expectations and Format:**

- Too much may be expected of the monitoring work groups (or since it is not clear what is expected – the lack of clarity may make it seem like a daunting task when it is not).
- No one wants to take leadership of the monitoring work groups –yet.
- The USFS prefers not to guide nor take leadership of the monitoring work groups or of the liaison panel. The USFS prefers to remain independent of the groups – providing information and expertise where needed and requested – and certainly to do whatever makes sense in support of this most important program.
- Transition Phase is a little muddy however, a step-by-step approach may assist with any uneasiness.
- Pull one group together – thinning/performance work group and focus on this group and their efforts.

VI. NEXT MEETING

The next Liaison Panel meeting will take place on March 20, 2004 from 11:00am until 3:00pm in Double Springs Ala., at the Trader and Farmers Bank, upstairs.) Please see page 2 for additional details.

VII: ITEMS OF INTEREST:

The National Forest Service provides an online glossary of ecosystem management terms to assist in learning about agency and scientific words. A glossary can assist in facilitating communication between citizens, management, and scientists. The glossary is located at: www.fs.fed.us/land/emterms.html

**USFS Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Initiative
Liaison Panel and Monitoring Work Group Meeting Agenda
- January 8th, 2003 Moulton, Alabama**

Meeting Objectives:

1. Encourage attendance of interested individuals in the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.
2. Encourage meeting someone new/learning about his or her respective interests in the Bankhead.
2. Develop a better understanding about the use of the USFS Contract Specifications for Thinning and Timber Sale.
3. Discuss current research proposal from AAMUniveristy regarding the interfacing of science and research into the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative.
4. Discuss proposed next steps for Monitoring Work Groups and Liaison Panel: what seems reasonable? achievable? what does not?

5:30pm Open House

5:45 pm Welcome/ Orientation - Mary Lou Addor

- *Intros - Meeting Objectives/Agenda/Meeting Summary and Ground Rules Review*
- *Review of Monitoring Work Group Handout*

6:10pm USFS Presentation - Contract Specification of Thinning -John Creed

- *Review of USFS efforts to date*
- *Review of anticipated efforts*
- *Role of Liaison Panel and Monitoring Groups with these efforts*
- *What is possible given current resources*

6:45pm Science and Research in the Bankhead- Rory Frazer

- *Proposed research plan*
- *Questions from participants*

7:15pm Break - Meet Someone You Do Not Know/Learn Something About His or Her Interests!

7:45pm Monitoring Groups Protocols/ Role of Liaison Panel -Mary Lou Addor and Steve Smutko

- *Review / discuss Monitoring Groups needed in next phase*
- *Work Group Protocols*
 - *Leadership of Groups*
 - *How to select members*
 - *Potential projects*
 - *How often should Monitoring Groups meet?*
- *What kind of support and resources do they need to succeed?*
- *Volunteers to help organize them*
- *Role of Liaison Panel - additional activities that the Liaison Panel wants to undertake.*

9:00pm Next Steps?

Facilitative Leadership Training? When? Whose Interested?
Adhoc Group to work on outreach plan
Adhoc Group to work on glossary
Notebooks for Liaison Panel/Each Work Group
Work Groups Develop Complete Action Plan with Budget for the Monitoring Effort

9:15pm Adjourn

CEFA-CREST: Center for Forest Ecosystems Assessment Proposal

Alabama A&M University: *Draft* CREST Proposal For Submission to The National Science Foundation

Center for Forestry and Ecology
Plant & Soil Sciences Department
School of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences

Contact: Rory Fraser
Phone 256-372-4217
Email: rfraser@aamu.edu

Center Project Summary: January 21, 2003

Alabama A&M University (AAMU) proposes to establish a **Center for Forest Ecosystems Assessment (CEFA)**. The two major goals of the Center are to: 1) strengthen integrative, multi-disciplinary research for improved understanding of forest ecosystems, and 2) increase the number of trained professionals, especially African-Americans, engaged in research, teaching and management of renewable natural resources. CEFA-CREST provides AAMU an apt opportunity to systematically plan for and accomplish these goals, which include: graduate student recruitment and retention, curricula and faculty development, acquisition of state-of-the-art equipment/instrumentation and facilities and planned synchrony in multi-disciplinary research and training.

Five multi-disciplinary research subprojects are proposed to bring our diverse faculty expertise to focus on and enhance our understanding of forest ecosystem dynamics. The **Vegetative Community (VC)** team will use repeated plot measurements to assess productivity changes in the response of the herbaceous, shrub, mid-story and over-story layers to fire in longleaf pine-bluestem, shortleaf pine-bluestem, and upland oak-bluestem community types. The **Macro-invertebrate and Vertebrate Communities (MV&C)** team will use a before-after and treatment-control experimental design to assess the structure and dynamics of a macroinvertebrate and a small vertebrate community in response to surface fires in three Cumberland Plateau forest ecosystems. The **Biogeochemical Nutrient Cycling (BNC)** team will use in-house standard techniques and collaborator-provided X-ray absorption near-edge spectroscopy (XANES) to assess the effect of disturbances of rhizospheric cycles (C-sequestration, C, N, S, and P immobilization and mineralization, microbial populations) on the nutrient dynamics and their relationship to the flora and fauna. Pedogenetic information will also be examined. The **Molecular Biology (MB)** team will use nuclear (AFLP, SSR) and chloroplast (cpDNA) DNA markers to determine the extent of inter- and intra-specific introgression and confirm existence and validity of "known" hybrids in the southeastern region. The adaptation of hybrids to disturbed sites will be correlated to their genetic backgrounds. The **Human Dimensions (HD)** team will use GIS to integrate primary data with population censuses and landownership maps to address questions about the human actors and social choices that are influenced by forest ecosystem processes. The impact of these relationships will be examined at different temporal and geographical scales.

The proposed Center structure provides a focus for addressing complex problems, facilitates sustained focus and coordination among research projects, and encourages integrative efforts. An Internal Executive Committee of top AAMU administrators will provide leadership for the Center. Triennial internal meetings will be used to foster coordination of efforts as well as collaboration across sub-projects. A PI Council (made up of the 14 faculty researchers) will serve as a working Center Steering Committee to implement, review and advance the efforts of the Center. Students (undergraduate, graduate and post-doctoral) will be at the core of each research team and supported by a ring of technical staff, faculty and external experts (adjunct faculty/advisors/ consultants). An External Advisory Board of highly regarded scientists will provide guidance, annual reviews, and assist in fostering research collaborations with other Centers, research institutions and researchers. Center research will be made available through the CEFA web-site, the Annual CEFA conference, and outreach to communities interested in natural resources monitoring, high-schools, community colleges and other HBCU's.

A key outcome of this project is the continuation of CEFA after CREST funding expires. Therefore, high quality research output will be expected and supported in the Center. Teams, faculty and students will be assessed annually on the basis of their scholarship, graduate education and outreach. Continuation of funding will be contingent on the production of refereed journal articles, new/revised graduate course offerings, grants awarded, and student recruitment and matriculation. Collaboration with external partners, presentations, meeting attendance, faculty release time, proposal writing and training will be encouraged and supported, to the extent that they lead to project related outcomes. The ultimate goal of CEFA is creating and sustaining an environment that attracts, stimulates, and inspires the highest quality research efforts from students and faculty, currently underrepresented in Science and Technology, and their collaborators.

Bankhead Liaison Panel Letter of Support for the Center for Forest Ecosystems Assessment Proposal

January 11, 2004

To: National Science Foundation:

The Bankhead Liaison Panel (BLP) consist of individuals (a community-based citizens group) representing highly diverse interests in the future of the Bankhead National Forest (BNF). The Liaison Panel formed in 2000 at the request of the District Ranger of the BNF for soliciting input into developing both immediate and long-term plans for the Bankhead National Forest. The Liaison Panel met on a frequent basis over the past 3 years in order to provide feedback on the recently approved Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. The Forest Health and Restoration Initiative was established to:

- Restore native upland hardwood forests;
- Restore native fire dependent pine and oak woodlands;
- Provide forest communities and habitats uncommon on other lands in the Southern Cumberland Plateau; and
- Improve the short-term forest health (reduce 10-year Southern Pine Beetle epidemic that has resulted in 18,000 acres of pine killed and other public safety hazards).

The Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative will focus on the following priorities during the approved 5-year work plan:

- Commercially thin 9,452 acres of overstocked loblolly pine; and
- Restoration of 6,860 acres of southern pine beetle impacted areas.

The long-term proposal for the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration is (Alternative 5):

- Area 1 – Emphasis on native upland hardwood restoration
- Area 2 – Emphasis on native fire-dependent shortleaf pine and oak woodland restoration
- Area 3 – Emphasis on native fire-dependent longleaf pine and oak woodland restoration

The expected results are:

- Short-term – reduced risk to Southern Pine Beetle infestation in remaining loblolly pine
- Long-term - healthier/sustainable watersheds, forests and habitats by:
 - Increasing acres of native upland hardwood forests
 - Increasing acres and distribution of native fire-dependent pine and oak woodlands.

The Liaison Panel and five Multiparty Monitoring and Evaluation Work Groups have begun to determine monitoring plans in order to observe and document activities and impacts resulting from implementation of the Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. During the January 8th meeting, Alabama A&M University (AAMU) presented its 5-year research proposal to establish a Center for Forest Ecosystems Assessment (CEFA). One major goal of the Center is creating “synergy” in science by strengthen integrative, multi-disciplinary research to improved understanding of forest ecosystems. Five multi-disciplinary research subprojects are proposed to enhance understanding of forest ecosystem dynamics:

- Macro-invertebrate and vertebrate communities
- Vegetative community;
- Bio-geo-chemical nutrient cycling
- Molecular biology
- Human dimension.

Members of the Liaison Panel, Multiparty Monitoring Work Groups, and other interested individuals attending the January 8th meeting recognized the proposed effort is an opportunity to involve the scientific community into the overall Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. This letter serves to represent support for this critical research - in order to inform future monitoring and evaluation efforts, to contribute to our understanding of the forest dynamics, and help guide future management of the Bankhead National Forest.

Sincerely,
Faron K. Weeks
BNFLP Steering Committee Designate

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January 8th Attendees: * Liaison Panel Member

Athel Wilhite Multiparty Monitoring Work Group (Land Owner)

*Mike Henshaw Alabama Cooperative Extension System

*Bill Snoddy Treasure Forest Land Owner

*Mary Lee Ratliff Recreation / Land Owner

*Randall LouAllen Lawrence County Commission

Ted Kuzma Multiparty Monitoring Work Group (Environmental)

*Randy Feltman Loggers and Sawmills

Anthony Hood Multiparty Monitoring Work Group (Resident)

Robert C. Hyatt Concerned Citizen

Sue Sparks Recreational User / Concerned Citizen / AAMU Student

Mike Bagwell Recreation / Land Owner

Joyce Bagwell Recreation / Land Owner

*Faron Weeks Warrior Mountain Historical and Cultural Society / Echota Cherokee Heritage Committee