Watershed Condition Classification & Watershed Restoration Action Plan
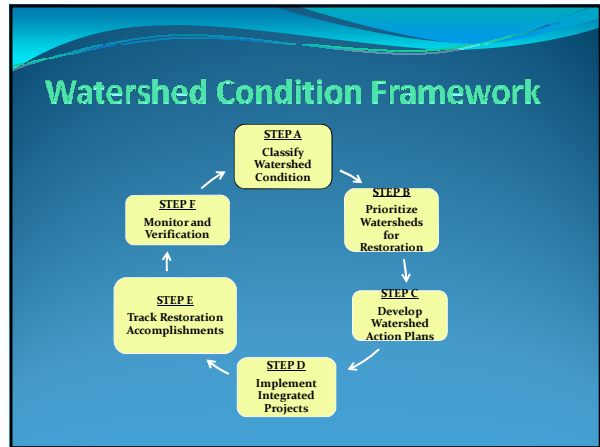
National Forests in Alabama

Forest Service Vision

USDA will use the restoration of watershed and forest health as a core management objective of the National Forests and Grasslands.

USDA Strategic Plan for FY 2010 – 2015

Watershed Condition Framework

- A comprehensive approach for pro-actively implementing integrated restoration on focus watersheds on National Forests and Grasslands

- Provides the Forest Service with an outcome-based performance measure for documenting improvement to watershed condition at Forest, Regional, and National scales

- Watershed Condition Framework Implementation Guide – WFWARP website
  http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/wfw/watershed/watershed-classification.html

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Watershed Condition Framework

STEP A Classify Watershed Condition
STEP B Prioritize Watersheds for Restoration
STEP C Develop Watershed Action Plans
STEP D Implement Integrated Projects
STEP E Track Restoration Accomplishments
STEP F Monitor and Verification

Watershed Condition Classification

- Establish a systematic process for determining Watershed Condition Class that can be applied consistently by the Agency
- Improve reporting and tracking of watershed condition
- Strengthen the effectiveness of the Forest Service in maintaining and restoring the productivity and resilience of watersheds and aquatic systems

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- **Watershed Condition** - the state of the physical and biological characteristics and processes within a watershed that affect the hydrologic and soil functions supporting aquatic ecosystems.

- **Watershed Condition Classification** - the process of describing watershed condition in terms of discrete categories (or classes) that reflect the level of watershed health or integrity.

Watershed Condition Classification

- Region 8 National Forests completed all Watershed Condition Classifications in 2011

- National Forests in Alabama's classifications were completed for 6th level HUC's at the Forest (Supervisor's Office) level by team of hydrologists, aquatic biologists, soil scientists and other resource experts

- Watersheds classified as Class 1, 2, or 3

  - Note the 6th level HUC watershed used is a larger watershed unit that the Bankhead's watershed inventory units for Forest Health & Restoration "Next Step" projects

Watershed Restoration Action Plan WRAP

- National Forests in Alabama will prepare 1 – 2 Watershed Restoration Action Plans annually based on Watershed Condition Classification

2011 - WRAP

- Rush-Brushy Watershed, Bankhead National Forest

Condition Class 1 - Good, Functioning

Rush-Brushy Watershed, Class 1

- Goal – Maintain as a Class 1 watershed
- Identify & implement projects for improvement and maintenance of watershed condition

Rush – Brushy Needs

- Primary need –
  - Reduce sedimentation of waterways from roads and trails

- Secondary needs -
  - Eradicate invasive species
  - Improve aquatic habitat
  - Maintain fire regime/native restoration projects

Important Ecological Values

- Ten aquatic species listed as Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive
- Designated Critical Habitat for Mussels
- Rare communities (wetlands and glades)
- Important Bird Area

Projects identified

- Owl Creek Horse Trail – re-route, relocation & maintenance
- Roads & trails – improve, maintain, decommission, block per MVUM, & correct fish passage barriers
- Fire Condition Class – improve and maintain through prescribed burning, midstory removal and thinning
- NNIS – eradicate
- Large woody debris – install fish structures

Five Year Project Period

Fuels Reduction Project Proposal

- Purpose and Need – restore native systems to improve function and resiliency, improve fire regime condition class and wildlife habitat, and reduce hazardous fuel loadings within the WUI to reduce chance of catastrophic wildfire
  - Restoration Goal (3) WRAP

- First thinning to reduce hazardous fuels
  - +/- 3,000 acres identified in Rush-Brushy Watershed that meet FHRP need for first thinning and were not included in the EIS
  - +/- 600 acres annually over a five year period
  - Loblolly pine stands age 15 – 55