

**Bankhead National Forest  
Liaison Panel Meeting Summary  
August 29, 2013  
First National Bank  
Double Springs, Alabama**

Forest Service Attendees:

Elrand Denson, District Ranger  
Blake Addison, Timber Management Assistant  
Tripp Gaskins, Silviculturist  
Allison Cochran, Wildlife Biologist

Liaison Panel Members:

James Alexander	LaVerne Matheson
Mark Kolinski	Chuck Byrd
Mike Henshaw	Shannon Holbrook
John Howell	Charles Borden
Randy Feltman	

Public Attendees:

Bill Bustin	Patricia Alexander
James Creel	Jerry Bouldin
Beth Smith	Mark Baker
Jo Carter	Starlin Blankenship
Lisa Gardner	Jim Hughes

**Meeting Agenda**

6:00	<b>Welcome</b>	<b>Elrand Denson,</b> District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead
6:15	<b>Recreation Project Horse Trail Maintenance Projects Update</b>	<b>James Alexander</b> Back Country Horsemen of Ala.
6:25	<b>Fall Landowner Workshop Series</b>	<b>Mike Henshaw</b> Ala. Cooperative Extension System

6:40	<b>At Risk Species Conservation</b>	<b>Shannon Holbrook</b> US Fish and Wildlife Service
7:10	<b>Greater Collier Watershed Environmental Assessment &amp; Herbicide Workshop</b>	<b>Tripp Gaskins,</b> District Silviculturist, USFS, Bankhead
8:15	<b>Closeout</b> Next meeting & agenda items Panel business items	<b>Elrand Denson</b> District Ranger, USFS, Bankhead

**Ranger Denson** opened the meeting with a welcome and by summarizing the Liaison Panel’s ground rules. Ranger Denson also welcomed and recognized Retired District Ranger Bill Bustin. Mr. Bustin addressed the group and shared that Bankhead was a really big part of his professional career as a forester and he really appreciates the public’s interest and the stakeholders working together as evidenced by the Liaison Panel.

**James Alexander, Backcountry Horsemen of Alabama, shared that his group was planning a work day on horse trails** tomorrow and Saturday to clear downed trees from trails and also on next Thursday through Saturday (Sept. 5 – 7). Rain has been holding up progress on volunteer projects. The group needs about three days to finish up the current improvement project they are working on the horse trail which includes spreading gravel. James expressed some disappointment that the horse trail bridges have not been installed. Elrand shared that the bridge work must be done in low water conditions and due to rain there may be delays. Elrand is coordinating with Trails Unlimited on the project.

A member of the panel asked James how the gravel was being spread on the trails. The volunteers are using wheel barrows and heavy equipment (tractor and dump wagon). The group is just waiting on drier conditons to use the tractor on the trail to avoid damaging the trail and the improvements that have been made.

**Mike Henshaw, Alabama Cooperative Extension System Winston County Coordinator, shared information on the on-going Fall Landowner Series.** The Bankhead National Forest, Bankhead Liaison Panel and Winston County Natural Resources Council held an Herbicide Workshop on August 10 at the Moreland Community Center. Mike shared pictures and highlights of that workshop. On August 14, the Extension sponsored a workshop on Planting Wildlife Food Plots at the Double Springs Municipal Building. Upcoming workshops in the Fall Landowner Series include Invasive Plant Control in Haleyville on September 4, Recreational Fish Pond Management in Double Springs on September 18, and Management of Feral Swine in Double Springs on October 3. The workshops are free, but registration is required. Funds from the Winston County Commission to the Winston County Natural Resources Council cover refreshments for the workshops. Registration information can be found on the Winston County Natural Resources Council blog or by calling Mike’s office. Mike shared information on two more local events. The 4-H Chick Chain Show will be on September 7 and backyard chickens will be for sale to benefit 4-H. A Pasture Walk and Rotational Grazing demonstration will be held on September 21 in Arley.

**Shannon Holbrook, US Fish and Wildlife Service, shared a presentation on At Risk Species Conservation.** A copy of the powerpoint is available by contacting the Bankhead. Shannon informed the group that part of her responsibilities are working with the Forest Service to make sure projects don’t have an

adverse effect on endangered species, for example like installing the horse trail bridges at low water periods that was discussed earlier. Shannon shared what's on the horizon with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, that there is potential federal listing of new species, how species are listed, and what is being done to protect species and keep them from becoming listed. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is receiving many petitions to list species. In 2010 there was a petition to list 450 species in the Southeast, of which 110 are in Alabama, and to address all candidate species currently on the endangered species list. This petition is known as the mega-petition. Shannon shared the At Risk Species strategy that was developed as a result of these petitions. The strategy guides the agency and partners to take action now to get conservation actions in place for these species so they won't need to be listed. Alabama has the third number of listed species in the nation, is number one in the number of aquatic species and is also the lead in the number of extinctions. Many groups, agencies, organizations, etc are working on conservation efforts, especially by watersheds. Shannon highlighted the efforts of these groups. Visit the candidate conservation website on the Fish & Wildlife Service's website to learn more about some of these efforts and species. [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Shannon talked about the 5 pronged approach the At Risk Species strategy takes to address conservation efforts for candidates and petitioned species. Shannon also shared that the Fleshy-fruit gladeceess, a candidate that occurs on Bankhead, is currently proposed for listing.

Shannon received many questions and comments from the panel and the public. LaVerne Matheson wanted to know why the FWS had not met with local stakeholder groups during the time when Alabama Power Company was not issuing permits for shoreline stabilization while flattened musk turtle was being addressed in Smith Lake. Chuck Byrd shared that he has worked with the FWS on several listed or petitioned plants and has had a very positive experience working with Shannon's office and private landowners to protect and promote plant habitat. Someone asked what percent of at risk species are aquatic. Many of the petitioned species are aquatic, fishes, mussels, and snails. A question was asked was there work to identify an umbrella species where you could protect one and cover many more. The FWS is going through that now. An example is to protect one stream with 10 species with similar habitat needs. Another example is the well known gopher tortoise. A question was asked about working with state agencies. The FWS is working with all conservation agencies and organizations. One example is the state of Alabama and the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center which is a great example of a cooperative partnership to conserve rare species. The most effective strategy for rare species conservation is to prevent habitat deterioration and keep species from becoming threatened. A question was asked about how long it will take for the fleshy-fruit gladeceess to become listed and if on-going off road use continues at the known site on Bankhead, will a violation fine be increased? There will be more weight to Forest Service actions if the species is listed. A question was whether the FWS worked closely with the Army Corps of Engineers on stream and wetland protection. Shannon's office does work closely with the Corps. There was discussion on the number of species listed in Winston County. And there was also discussion on timelines, particularly an interest from Randy Feltman on speeding up timelines for salvage timber harvest. There was discussion on the timelines associated with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act and also with the State Historic Preservation Office. Evaluating and receiving concurrence on effects to Endangered Species from Forest Service project proposals is a streamlined and fairly fast (usually less than 30 days) part of a larger process, including evaluating other environmental effects, effects to archaeological and cultural resources, and preparing and advertising a timber sale.

**Tripp Gaskins, Bankhead Silviculturist, provided an overview, summary and update on where we are with the Greater Collier Watershed Environmental Assessment and the Herbicide Workshop held on August 10.** A copy of Tripp's powerpoint on the Greater Collier Watershed project is available by contacting the Bankhead. During his presentation, Tripp and Wildlife Biologist Allison Cochran provided information in response to comments and questions received during the Scoping Period for this project. These are provided below.

Comment Re-evaluate restoration goals associated with oak woodland DFC.

The Oak Woodland DFC was included in the FHRP EIS as a native community type in the Southern Cumberland Plateau and appropriate restoration goal for the Bankhead. Particularly, this DFC was included and supported by stakeholders to increase the amount of early successional wildlife habitat on the Bankhead and the Black Warrior WMA. All previous restoration efforts towards this DFC have been conducted in loblolly pine or mixed pine/hardwood stands and the DFC/restored community has not been achieved. The proposal for oak woodlands in the Greater Collier Watershed is the first time we will attempt to restore oak woodlands in an existing oak stand.

Comment – Questions about the amount of oak advanced regeneration present and the Basal Area retention identified in the stand proposed for regeneration to oak.

There are +/- 2000 stems/acre of oak and hickory present and +/- 2000 stems/acre of other hardwoods present. The low basal area identified is appropriated because we have such high regeneration counts present. The goal is to achieve a two story stand and we have the oak regeneration needed to get it. A shelterwood preparatory cut is not required.

Comment – Herbicide Use, specifically in Release Treatments

The goal of good site preparation is that release will not be needed. However, it is a tool that we want to have available in case of ineffective site prep. Also, release of existing shortleaf plantations may be required. We will also be using manual release. An evaluation of each stand and its need will be made.

Comment – Site prep prescribed burning and concerns with sterilization of soil

The type of site prep burning we have been conducting is what we are proposing. Some of those sites are monitored by Liaison panel restoration monitoring group and pictures of success of shortleaf plantations with excellent site prep burns was shared. The monitoring site in Compartment 132 is an example. The District and Supervisor's Office staff regularly review all prescribed burning operations, particularly as they relate to soil and water effects. The Forest Soil Scientist has not observed any site prep burning activity that has sterilized soil or caused concern about erosion.

Comment – Retaining hemlock.

Each stand will be evaluated. Hemlock will be considered on a case by case basis. Individual hemlock in the uplands of a pine stand will likely be removed as it is off site. Hemlocks on a bluff or along drains and lower slope will be retained.

Comment – Some stands appear to be in Wild & Scenic River Corridor

Stands proposed for treatment in the Scenic River Corridor were shown on a map. The proposed treatment is first thinning for forest health and long-term restoration to their desired future condition of hardwood forest.

Comment – Which areas are proposed for Midstory Removal

This was shown on a map. All stands marked with hatching and all intermediate thinning stands within burn units are proposed for midstory removal.

Comment – Which non-native grass/forbs are being recommended for revegetation? Why not use all natives? Native warm season grass mixture (nwsg) will be specified in commercial timber sale contracts associated with the Greater Collier Watershed EA. It is recommended when broadcasting native warm season grass mixes, which is our method, to use a carrier seed to aid in broadcast. Typically a non-persistent annual small grain is used, for example wheat or brown-top millet. This will be used in the Greater Collier watershed. Additionally, native warm season grasses can be slow to establish. The purpose of seeding temp roads, landings and skid trails is immediate erosion control. Therefore, an annual will be used, as a carrier described above, and to offer quick cover to reduce erosion potential. Often the time for seeding landings and temp roads, when the sale closes, is not the ideal seeding time for nwsg. This is another reason to use a non-persistent annual to provide quick cover unit nwsg become established. In cases of steep slopes or an erosion problem, a mix of non-

persistent non-natives may be used for erosion control. We plan to use a mix of bluestems, Indian grass and other native species for the Cumberland Plateau/North Alabama.

Comment – Do not treat “All” glades and outcrops, only ones that are in burn units and only use herbicides on glades where nnis are a significant threat, and establish a no equipment zone on glades.

Herbicide use on glades and rock outcrops is addressed in the NFs in AL Enhanced Invasives EA. Commercial timber harvest may occur on glades where restoration is needed. A “winching” or green zone will be established around the rare community to prevent impacts to existing glade vegetation. Glades present will be prioritized for restoration. All glades will likely not be treated, but all can be considered. Prioritization for treatment will include current condition and restoration need, size, ability to maintain longterm (for example within a burn unit/access/etc), rare species presence, current impacts (for example, recreation), and funding.

Comment – What action is proposed in Brushy Lake?

This portion of the proposed action has been removed from the Greater Collier Watershed EA. While there is a clear and long-established need to manage Brushy lake, the ID Team decided the project is complex and large enough in scope to be a stand-alone project.

Comment – What is being proposed in “restoring hydrology” of ponds and wetlands?

Where needed and based on prioritization as described for glades, ponds and wetlands may be improved or restored. Examples of restoration that may be needed include plugging ditches or removing other artificial drainage structures from wetlands; removing berms, ruts, roads, etc that are altering flow to wetlands; removing brush and trees from wetlands or pond edges or dams if drying is occurring; treating nnis plants; and repairing manmade ponds if needed by excavating, repairing dams or removing encroaching vegetation.

There were a few questions on the proposed Greater Collier watershed actions. Charles Borden asked about the wind effects on adjacent areas as he has observed wind throw after harvest operations. This has not been addressed specifically, however there are minimum buffers along canyons and bluffs and also hardwood inclusions are clumped to reduce windfall. There was discussion that sometimes densely planted stands don't develop deep roots, especially on shallow soils and bluffs which could account for the windthrow being observed. There was a question on how a harvest unit is buffered. Harvest units are marked on the ground with paint. Buffering depends on what is present on the ground. There was a question about the timeline and the number of alternatives for the Greater Collier watershed EA. The project is already behind our proposed timeline, but it is top priority for District staff to have completed quickly. There will be two alternatives, no action and proposed action.

There was a question about the timeline associated with the timber harvest near the Owl Creek Horse trails. The sale is sold and might start anytime. The Bankhead will let recreation users know when the harvest is to begin by posting signs.

Elrand Denson wrapped up the meeting and shared that the amount of rain this year has caused some projects to be delayed this year. He thanked Backcountry Horsemen of Alabama for their volunteer work and believes their presence on the horse trails helps increase fee and rule compliance. There were concerns raised about feral swine particularly in the Wilderness and a request was made to have that topic on a Liaison Panel meeting agenda soon. Someone shared that the problem is Forest-wide, not only in the Wilderness, and damage is evident along streams.

There was a question about the presentation by Forest Supervisor Steve Lohr at the June 2012 Bankhead Liaison Panel meeting regarding oil and gas leasing on Bankhead and whether there is any updated information. Elrand shared that the expression of interest has not been withdrawn. The next set of sales and leases will be advertised on the Bureau of Land Management's website.

Please contact Allison Cochran at the Bankhead National Forest at 205-489-5111 or [bkinfo@fs.fed.us](mailto:bkinfo@fs.fed.us) for copies of power point presentations.