

DRAFT RECORD OF DECISION
BEASLEY POND ANALYSIS AREA
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
COMPARTMENTS 25, 26, 27, 28 & 29
APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST
LIBERTY COUNTY, FLORIDA

DECISION

Based on my review of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), consideration of public comments, internal discussions and consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, I have decided to implement the following activities proposed in Alternative B:

- First or intermediate thinning of approximately 1987 acres of slash and longleaf pine stands. Stands range in age from 25 to 141 years old. Younger slash and longleaf pine plantations have a basal area (BA) ranging from 70 to 173 square-feet per acre. Thinning these stands would reduce the BA to an average of 50 square feet per acre thus opening the stands for sunlight penetration needed for continued growth and groundcover establishment.
- Conduct uneven-aged management cuts on 696 acres of mature longleaf pine. In areas of existing longleaf pine regeneration trees would be removed to create openings that would encourage seedling development and growth. Openings will range from ¼ -2 acres (average size of ½ acre) in size. The stand in its entirety will be thinned to 50 square feet per acre of basal area.
- Wet savanna restoration treatments on approximately 811 acres of savanna sites. Girdling will be used in stands that cannot be accessed for traditional logging operations (stands 19 and 41 in compartment 26 and stand 37 in compartment 27). All of these sites have either been planted over with slash pine or have been encroached upon by woody brush species and hardwood tree species. To restore these wet savanna sites a variable residual BA strategy will be implemented with groundcover condition serving as the trigger point for thinning intensity. In portions of the stand where herbaceous groundcover is deemed sufficient the Forest Service proposes to thin to a residual BA of 10-30 square feet per acre of standing live timber. Sufficient groundcover is needed when thinning to a lower BA in order to continue the use of prescribed fire as a means of maintaining the open park-like structure associated with wet savannas. When groundcover conditions are deemed less than adequate to carry fire the Forest Service

proposes to leave a residual BA of 40 in order to allow needle cast to serve as primary carrier of fire across the stand.

- Foliar application of the herbicide triclopyr (as needed) on 811 acres of wet savanna restoration sites for woody species control. Treatment would consist of using backpack sprayers only where there is a presence of woody vegetation that threatens the re-establishment of wet savanna plant species. If the savanna restoration areas do not show evidence of woody re-sprouting after harvest it will not receive chemical treatment.
- Clearcut 16 acres of slash pine plantation for borrow pit excavation to provide surface material for future road work.
- Remove six cattle guards from a closed cattle allotment (two on highway 379, two on FSR 113, and one on FSRs 174 and 109).

Connected actions necessary to facilitate the proposed action include maintenance of 7.5 miles of landlines, reconstruction of approximately 12.83 miles of system roads, temporary improvement and use of approximately 4 miles of non-system which provide access to pine plantations, and the maintenance of approximately 14.73 miles of system roads used to haul timber products from the analysis area.

CHANGES MADE FOLLOWING NOTICE AND COMMENT PERIOD

A notice of availability and request for public comment was published in the Federal Register in March of 2015. Based on detailed comments received and subsequent discussion with commenters and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the following changes have been made to the proposed action and potential implementation of the project:

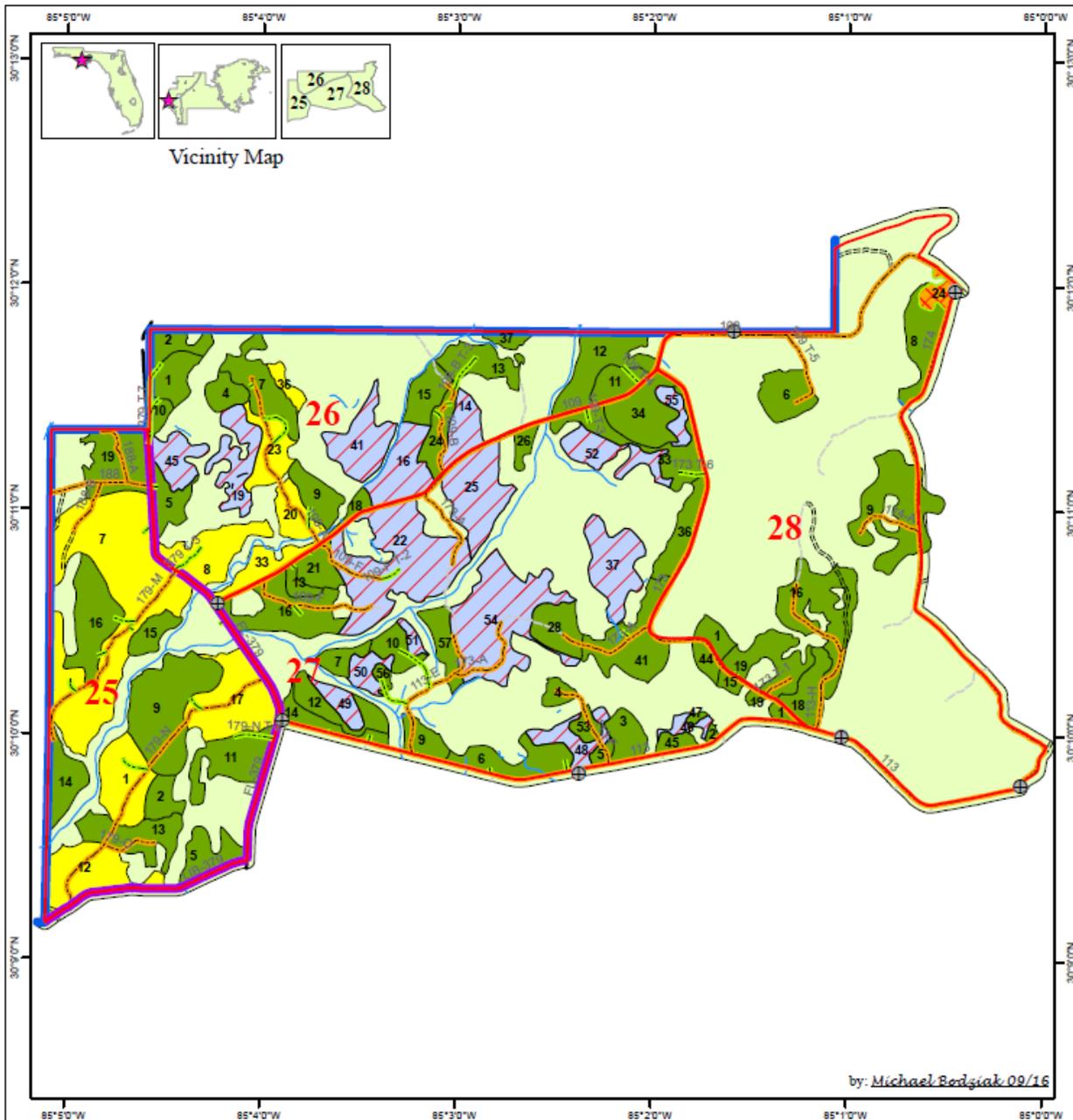
- Stands 27-23, 28-5, 28-7, and 28-22 have been removed from the proposed action (218 total acres). Commenters expressed concerns with these stands due to their age and lower BA. Although the forest service believes these stands would benefit from treatment and the forest plan allows for harvest to occur in older stands, I have decided to remove them from the proposed action.
- Additional coordination measures were added to reduce impacts to RCW and Florida skullcap. (pages 31-34 of FEIS)
- Additional cumulative effects information added. (Chapter 3 of FEIS)
- Information on sensitive plant species added (82-84 of FEIS)

These changes to the proposed action and additions to the effects analysis in the FEIS are within the scope of the project and are not considered new information pursuant to 40CFR 1502.9(c).

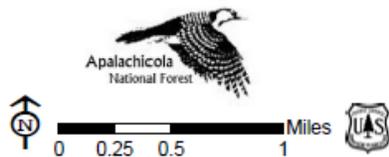
BACKGROUND

The Beasley Pond Analysis Area was identified on the Apalachicola National Forest 5-Year Timber Sale Plan as an area in need of both ecosystem rehabilitation and maintenance. This analysis area falls within Management Areas (MA) 7.1 and 7.2. An interdisciplinary approach was used to evaluate areas and propose treatments to move the stands toward a desired future condition. These areas are predominantly longleaf and slash pine forests that are managed with a focus on maintaining or restoring ecosystem health. The analysis area is located between State Highways 379 and 65; just north of FSR 113 of the Apalachicola Ranger District.

The Forest Plan outlines several goals for the National Forests of Florida, one of which calls for the conservation and protection of declining natural communities, and uncommon biological, ecological, or geological sites (USDA 1999b). The Beasley Pond Analysis area has been identified as containing overstocked stands and areas of wet prairies that are unique in both soil and plant characteristics. The primary purpose of this proposal is to maintain, improve, and restore a healthy forest ecosystem by: thinning both longleaf and slash pine stands to allow for further tree growth, restoring remnant wet savannas to improve habitat for a variety of plant species, and controlling overabundant woody plant species to restore herbaceous groundcover. Secondary benefits include maintaining and growing a stable red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) habitat and improving the current transportation system. There is a need to move the analysis area from its existing condition, to the desired condition as identified in the forest plan for MA 7.1 and 7.2. This will be accomplished by reducing current stocking levels of stands within the project area to open the forest canopy and promote herbaceous groundcover growth and establishment. There also exists a need for rehabilitation and maintenance in declining natural wet savanna sites in the project area while maintaining a stable RCW population.



Beasley Pond Analysis Area
 Alternative B (Proposed Action)
 Apalachicola Ranger District
 Compartment 25,26,27,28, & 29



Legend	
Proposed Treatment Stands	Road / Engineering
Thin	Maintenance
Modified Group Selection	Reconstruction
Savannah Restoration Thin	Temporary
Clearcut for Borrow Pit	Cattleguards
Woody Species Control: Spot Treat with Herbicide (as necessary)	Clearcut for Borrow Pit
	Land Features
	Apalachicola National Forest
	Compartment
	Streams

CPMT	Stand	Acres	Forest Type	Age	Treatment	Triclopyr
25	1	62	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
25	2	21	Slash Pine	54	Thin	
25	5	35	Slash Pine	42	Thin	
25	7	285	Longleaf Pine	81	Modified Group Selection	
25	9	114	Slash Pine	42	Thin	
25	11	58	Slash Pine	42	Thin	
25	12	76	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
25	13	54	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
25	14	39	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
25	15	21	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
25	16	65	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
25	17	91	Longleaf Pine	83	Modified Group Selection	
25	18	27	Longleaf Pine	83	Thin	
25	19	66	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
26	1	30	Slash Pine	72	Thin	
26	2	24	Slash Pine	43	Thin	
26	4	19	Slash Pine	43	Thin	
26	5	29	Slash Pine	72	Thin	
26	7	50	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
26	8	61	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
26	9	30	Slash Pine	42	Thin	
26	10	11	Slash Pine	43	Thin	
26	11	25	Slash Pine	65	Thin	
26	12	63	Longleaf Pine	43	Thin	
26	13	39	Slash Pine	30	Thin	
26	14	31	Slash Pine	54	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	31
26	15	31	Slash Pine	72	Thin	
26	16	54	Slash Pine	72	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40	54
26	18	10	Slash Pine	42	Thin	
26	19	50	Undrained Flatwoods	76	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40 (Girdle)	50
26	20	30	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
26	23	48	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
26	24	29	Longleaf Pine	118	Thin	

CPMT	Stand	Acres	Forest Type	Age	Treatment	Triclopyr
26	33	32	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
26	36	11	Longleaf Pine	86	Modified Group Selection	
26	37	10	Slash Pine	31	Thin	
26	41	55	Undrained flatwoods	76	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40 (Girdle)	55
26	45	34	Slash Pine	72	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40	34
27	1	7	Longleaf Pine	25	Thin	
27	2	3	Longleaf Pine	25	Thin	
27	3	27	Slash Pine	43	Thin	
27	4	12	Longleaf Pine	26	Thin	
27	5	7	Slash Pine	72	Thin	
27	6	49	Slash Pine	56	Thin	
27	7	16	Longleaf Pine	85	Thin	
27	9	22	Longleaf Pine	26	Thin	
27	10	23	Slash Pine	43	Thin	
27	12	34	Slash Pine	72	Thin	
27	13	10	Longleaf Pine	87	Thin	
27	14	58	Longleaf Pine	87	Thin	
27	15	8	Longleaf Pine	25	Thin	
27	16	73	Longleaf Pine	43	Thin	
27	19	4	Longleaf Pine	25	Thin	
27	21	25	Slash Pine	56	Thin	
27	22	164	Slash Pine	72	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40	164
27	23	29	Longleaf Pine	123	Thin	
27	25	77	Slash Pine	54	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40	77
27	26	12	Slash Pine	67	Thin	
27	28	37	Slash Pine	54	Thin	
27	33	57	Slash Pine	65	Thin	
27	34	58	Longleaf Pine	141	Thin	
27	36	37	Slash Pine	26	Thin	
27	37	63	Longleaf Pine	56	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40 (Girdle)	63
27	41	71	Slash Pine	56	Thin	
27	44	13	Slash Pine	51	Thin	
27	45	11	Slash Pine	72	Thin	

CPMT	Stand	Acres	Forest Type	Age	Treatment	Triclopyr
27	46	9	Slash Pine	72	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	9
27	47	3	Slash Pine	72	Thin	
27	48	30	Slash Pine	72	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	30
27	49	19	Slash Pine	72	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 40 BA	19
27	50	19	Longleaf Pine	85	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	19
27	51	8	Slash Pine	43	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	8
27	52	41	Slash Pine	67	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	41
27	53	12	Slash Pine	77	Thin	
27	54	141	Slash Pine	56	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	141
27	55	16	Slash Pine	65	Wet savanna Restoration Thin to 10-40 BA	16
27	56	6	Longleaf Pine	85	Thin	
27	57	28	Longleaf Pine	56	Thin	
28	1	15	Slash Pine	51	Thin	
28	5	52	Longleaf Pine	81	Thin	
28	6	38	Slash Pine	54	Thin	
28	7	91	Longleaf Pine	81	Modified Group Selection	
28	8	46	Slash Pine	44	Thin	
28	9	79	Slash Pine	32	Thin	
28	16	87	Slash Pine	32	Thin	
28	18	33	Slash Pine	51	Thin	
28	19	51	Slash Pine	93	Thin	
28	22	46	Longleaf Pine	80	Modified Group Selection	
28	24	16	Slash Pine	44	Clearcut Site For Borrow Pit Excavation	
29	12	15	Slash Pine	32	Thin	
Totals		3728				811

COORDINATION MEASURES

The following coordination measures will be incorporated into the implementation of alternative B to reduce the risk of potential impacts to the physical, biological, and social-economic environments. These measures include all applicable Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines described below. Except where specifically noted, the analysis in Chapter 3 of the EIS assumes that coordination measures would be followed.

Proposed, Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive (PETS) Species

- If modifications are made in the project, or if additional information regarding the effects of the project on listed species becomes available, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) would be notified and consultation would be reinitiated if the USFWS or the FS determines it is needed.
- There are isolated wetlands in the project area. Due to the poor condition of the harvest area, harvest would be allowed up to the ponds. Harvest will be restricted to these areas only when it is dry enough to allow for minimal soil disturbance.
 - There will be no timber harvest within 1500 feet of documented ponds during flatwoods salamander breeding season (October 1 – May 1) unless an exception is given by the Forest Service District Biologist.
 - Exceptions that allow timber harvest and associated hauling may be granted by the District Biologist in coordination with USFWS depending on weather. For example, logging could continue on into October through November if dry conditions persist and there have been no rain events that trigger movement to the breeding ponds. Also, logging may be able to resume in the spring if ponds have dried.
- If it becomes necessary to utilize Forest Service Road (FSR) 173 as a haul route during flatwoods salamander breeding season, the Forest Service would install culverts, silt fence or other appropriate measures to allow passage of flatwoods salamanders across the road.
- Maintenance and hauling on FSR 173-A and FSR 109 T-5 will be done outside of the flatwoods salamander breeding season. These roads will be brought up to grade but will not be ditched.
- To minimize soil disturbance in areas containing known populations of federally listed plants, harvest will be restricted to dry time periods. This will be monitored with the placement of groundwater wells in harvest units by USFS timber sale administrators. Suitable conditions usually occur when the water table is 25 inches, or greater, below the surface.
- Temporary roads, log decks, and skid trails shall be located outside of areas of high density Florida skullcap, i.e., areas with at least 500 flowering stems.
- Known populations of Florida skullcap within the analysis area will be monitored for at least one burn rotation following timber harvest to measure the effects of the proposed

action. Coordinate with the USFWS to develop and implement the monitoring design and protocol. (See monitoring plan in Appendix A)

- Contracts would contain penalty clauses to protect white-banded RCW trees.
- When possible log decks should be located no closer than 200 ft. from RCW cavity trees. This cannot be avoided in all clusters in the project area due to hydric soil conditions. Exemptions needed are identified in the foraging analysis located in the Biological Assessment.
- Active clusters that may be adversely affected by timber harvest activities occurring during the nesting season will be monitored and reports provided to the USFWS on each cluster's status and reproductive success. (See monitoring plan in Appendix A)
- Purchasers and contractors will be educated in gopher tortoise burrow identification. In potential gopher tortoise habitat, prohibit locating log landings, designated skid trails, and parking equipment within 25 feet of known gopher tortoise burrows. Equipment operators will be instructed to maintain a 25 foot distance during operations when previously unknown burrows are encountered.
- Purchasers and contractors will be advised of the possible presence of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and will be instructed to avoid harming any wildlife they encounter, including snakes.
- Equipment cleaning measures would be required by contracts to prevent the introduction or spread of non-native invasive plants.
- To protect aquatic species; pesticide application, timber harvesting activities, and road maintenance will adhere to the standards of Florida's Silvicultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). For a detailed discussion of these practices, see the Silviculture BMP Manual: http://freshfromflorida.s3.amazonaws.com/silvicultural_bmp_manual.pdf

Heritage Resources

- **HE-1** If any cultural resources are discovered during operations all ground-disturbing activity will cease. The Forest Archeologist will determine changes to be made to the project before work resumes (USDA 1999b).
- **HE-9** Known cultural resource sites will be protected by timber sale contract and no ground-disturbing activities will occur in these areas, which may include segments of roads (USDA 1999b).

Public Health and Safety

- Use herbicides in accordance with registration label. Place herbicide notice signs at treatment sites. Herbicide notice signs (FSH 7109.11) would be clearly posted, and would include the application date, the herbicide used, and safe reentry date. Private lands would not be treated. No herbicide would be applied within 100 feet of private land. No herbicide would be applied within 100 feet of any public or domestic water source.
- The Pesticide Use Handbook (FSH 2109.14) and the Health and Safety Code Handbook (FSH 6709.11) would be used as guidance for workers. Workers who apply herbicides

would be trained to ensure minimum impacts and maximum effectiveness. Only those methods that assure proper application of herbicides would be used. Herbicide application by contract and/or in-house personnel would be performed by or directly supervised by the holder of a current Federal Pesticide Applicator's license following all current legal application procedures administered by the USDA Forest Service and the label on the herbicide container.

Soil & Water

- **WA-1** Adhere to standards of Florida's Silvicultural Best Management Practices (BMPs). For a detailed discussion of these practices, see the Silviculture BMP Manual: http://freshfromflorida.s3.amazonaws.com/silvicultural_bmp_manual.pdf
- **WA-2** Gregory Mill Creek is located within the analysis area (compartments 25, 26, and 27) and drains into Florida Creek. The creek was classified as an impaired waterway in 1998 and was delisted in 2008. A 35-foot Special/Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) will be required in the following areas (LRMP, 3-24): compartment 25 Stands 1, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18; compartment 26 stands 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 27, 33; and compartment 27 stands 6, 7, 9, 10, 16, 22, 25, 26, 28, 37, and 41. No operation of heavy equipment will occur during periods when weather and soil conditions will promote excessive rutting or compaction.
- FSR 109 T-5 will be closed following timber harvest.
- Forest Plan standard **WA-6** Restrict soil compacting activities, including logging traffic when the water table is within 12 inches of the surface, or when soil moisture exceeds the plastic limits (USDA 1999b).

Vegetation

- **VG-37** - Control invasive terrestrial and aquatic weeds. Do not apply herbicides within 60 feet of any PETS plant species unless analysis indicate herbicide use is the best way to protect PETS plants from invasive weeds (USDA 1999b). Contract specifications for equipment cleaning will be placed in contracts to prevent the introduction of exotic plants.
- Follow guidelines for planning and applying herbicides (USDA 1999a).
- **VG-19** – If herbicides are used for woody species control, use only spot grid or strip application or individual stem or directed foliar spray. Do not use herbicides for site preparation within 60 feet of any known PETS plant species, except where it is necessary to restore PETS habitat. Clearly mark buffers around PETS species so applicators can see and avoid them.

Visual Quality

- **VG-15** - To enhance visual quality, require that slash, tops, and logging debris be piled no more than 2 feet high within 100 feet of levels A and B roads and designated trails. There are no stands within the analysis area that require visual mitigation.

DECISION RATIONALE

I have selected alternative B, as modified, after careful consideration of potential impacts and benefits presented by the interdisciplinary team and comments received during previous comment periods. Alternative B best fits the need for action in the analysis area, which is to reduce stocking levels of stands within the project area, promote herbaceous groundcover establishment and growth, and to rehabilitate and maintain declining natural wet savanna sites.

The environmentally preferable alternative is the one which would cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment. The No Action alternative (Alternative A) would not authorize the removal of timber, mechanical fuel reduction and application of chemicals. Management throughout the area would only consist of previously approved treatments such as prescribed burning and non-native invasive species control.

Although alternative B has a greater impact on the environment in the short term, I have decided to implement the actions because it would provide greater net benefits to the landscape.

The selected alternative will provide the greatest opportunity to restore 811 acres remnant savannas. The No Action alternative would leave these areas in their current conditions. Planted savannas would continue to be forested and lacking in plant species diversity indicative of historic savanna sites. Alternative C would also result in the restoration of savannas but not to the extent as the selected alternative. Alternative C minimizes impacts to rare plant species by avoiding stands 54 and 37 in compartment 27. Savanna treatment areas would all be thinned to a 40 BA to minimize impacts to RCW. With proper implementation of the coordination measures discussed on pages 7-9, I believe that alternative B can be implemented without causing substantial damage to rare plant and animal populations (See USFS's Biological Assessment for more information on rare plant and threatened and endangered animal species impacts).

Alternative D is similar to alternative B but does not include the use of herbicide. I chose alternative B because the use of herbicide in savanna areas would aid in removing palmetto, gallberry, and other woody plant species that are currently populating many of these areas. Herbicide use will prove beneficial in the event that the project area cannot be burned in its normal rotation. Woody plant species encroachment could occur after timber removal without the use of chemical control treatments. Pre and post-harvest groundcover monitoring will occur throughout the project area to ensure that treatments are having the desired results.

Authorizing alternative B would also include thinning approximately 1987 acres of slash and longleaf pine stands. Thinning these stands best meets the purpose and need for action and move the analysis area towards its desired future condition. The No Action alternative would result in the continued overstocking of many of the stands within the analysis area. In treatment stands

that are more open the No Action alternative would lead to the gradual overstocking and shading of the understory. Alternative C achieves the purpose and need for thinning but to a lesser degree than the selected alternative. Several stands are removed to limit the impact to rare plants and RCW habitat. As stated earlier, with the proper implementation of coordination measures mentioned on pages 7-9 I believe that alternative B can be implemented without jeopardizing populations of rare plants and RCW habitat.

I am approving uneven-aged management cuts of 696 acres of mature longleaf pine under alternative B. The cuts would include removing trees around already existing longleaf regeneration thus creating an opening that on average would be ½ acre. The desired future condition for M.A. 7.0 states:

“During the next two decades, portions of the longleaf pine forests are characterized by patches ranging between ¼ and 2 acres where longleaf pine regeneration is found. These areas will begin to take on an uneven-aged structure. Patches up to 80 acres are found in other areas where longleaf pine is restored. These areas will have an even-aged structure. A few patches up to 80 acres in size are found in the slash pine and loblolly pine forest types with a two-aged appearance.”

These treatments align with goals and objectives of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida.

The Beasley Pond Analysis Area EIS documents the analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A notice of intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on October 10, 2014 (79 FR 61282). The proposed action was listed in the Apalachicola National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the environmental analysis. All interested parties were invited to review and comment on the proposal through scoping letters that were mailed/emailed to our scoping list. The EIS lists agencies, organizations, and people who received copies on page 104.

The following issues were identified from scoping comments and were used to determine the scope of the analysis.

1. The use of herbicides can be a highly controversial management activity with potential environmental and human health impacts.
2. Timber logging and hauling activities could negatively impact rare and sensitive plant and animal species.
3. Removal of trees for wet savanna restoration reduces foraging habitat available for the RCW.

A full description of issues significant to the proposed action appears in the EIS on pages 91-20.

A draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) was published for review and comment on March 6, 2015 (80 FR 12173).

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives, which are discussed below. Alternative A is the environmentally preferred alternative. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EIS, chapters two and three.

Alternative A – Under the No Action alternative, current management activities such as prescribed burning and non-native invasive species treatments would continue to occur throughout the project area. No new activities would be implemented to accomplish project goals.

Alternative C – Alternative C would implement all treatments identified in Alternative B with the exception of stands 37, 54, and 57 in compartment 27 and stand 19 in compartment 28 being removed to reduce potential impact to the rare plant species Florida skullcap. All proposed wet savanna restoration treatments will be thinned to 40 BA to reduce potential impacts to RCW habitat and timber harvest would follow seasonal guidelines in the RCW Recovery Plan to avoid disturbance during the April-July breeding season.

Alternative D - This alternative would include all actions described in the proposed action except herbicide use. The desired condition would be achieved by using handtools to control woody species in proposed wet savanna treatment areas. The forest plan was approved to align management with requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and this project complies with relevant portions of that act.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the National Forest in Florida Land Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with direction from the plan. The forest plan was approved to align management with requirements of the National Forest Management Act of 1976, and this project complies with relevant portions of that act.

In compliance with the Endangered Species Act, a Biological Assessment was prepared and formal consultation was initiated in April 2015. The USFWS provided a Biological Opinion signed August 19, 2016 that contained a no jeopardy finding and incidental take statement for the potential effects of this project on RCW.

Pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act and other federal laws protecting cultural resources, a cultural resource survey was completed and concurrence was received from the State Historic Preservation Office on April 24, 2014.

The Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) requires federal agency actions to be consistent with state coastal management programs. All counties in the State of Florida are considered

coastal. This project was submitted to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida State Clearinghouse to assure compliance with the CZMA and State of Florida laws and regulations. No state agencies provided comments suggesting that the project was inconsistent with the CZMA or state laws for environmental protection.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (OBJECTION) OPPORTUNITIES

During this phase of public involvement the Final EIS (FEIS) will be published in the federal register for the 45 day objection period pursuant 36 CFR 218. A legal notice posted in the *Calhoun Liberty Journal* will be the sole means of calculating the end of the objection period. The FEIS and a draft Record of Decision (i.e., this document) will be posted on the National Forest in Florida project webpage <http://goo.gl/GZ3NXm>. Letters or emails announcing this opportunity to object will be sent to concerned citizens, adjacent landowners, organizations, and other agencies that have submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the project during previous comment periods (i.e. scoping and notice and comment periods). Objections may be mailed electronically, in common digital format, to objections-southern-florida@fs.fed.us. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (36 CFR 218.8).

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no objection is filed, this decision may be implemented no sooner than five days following the end of the 45 day objection period that begins the day after publication of my decision in the federal register. If an objection is filed implementation would not occur until the issuance of an objection resolution letter.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: [contact name, title, unit name, mailing address, and phone number].

Date

District Ranger

*This document is a draft and is not considered a final decision document. A final decision notice will be signed at the conclusion of the administrative review period.

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APPENDIX A. MONITORING PLAN

The introduction to the Forest Plan (USDA 1999a, p. 1.1) recognized the need for an adaptive approach to resource management, including monitoring to test assumptions and consider the results for planning and implementing future management actions. The Beasley Pond project provides an opportunity to employ this approach, and the USFS has committed to monitoring the effects of this project on RCW and Florida skullcap.

The Beasley Pond EIS recognized that there is some uncertainty regarding the effects of the proposed wet savanna restoration treatments. Although these activities are not unprecedented on the forest, the effects of previous efforts have not been evaluated with rigorous pre- and post-implementation monitoring of potentially affected resources, particularly groundcover plant species. Additionally, the Biological Opinion provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service included the following non-discretionary actions related to monitoring red-cockaded woodpeckers:

- The USFS or their contractors shall monitor the level of take [of RCW] associated with forest management activities as described within this BO. (p. 36)

- The USFS, or qualified contractors, shall monitor the RCW breeding productivity (with use of peeper scope up to fledgling success*) at the active RCW clusters impacted by primary hauling roads, roads requiring construction during nesting season, and clusters impacted by log landings within the 200 ft. buffer zones. Monitoring these clusters shall occur each year that a cluster has potential direct impacts. A post project report shall be submitted to USFWS to: (1) summarize the timing of impacts from the proposed project that occurred near or within the active cluster(s); (2) describe the productivity of each cluster, and; (3) describe relationship of impacts from the proposed project if possible. Comparisons of productivity with impacted clusters with the clusters monitored for translocation might prove valuable. (p. 37-38)

Monitoring the effects of project implementation on red-cockaded woodpeckers, including the variables described above, will occur following typical methods that do not require additional explanation here. The Biological Opinion included the following recommendations for monitoring Florida skullcap:

- Expand the commitment of the USFS's Conservation Measure to monitor impacts to Florida skullcap, the USFS, with input from USFWS and Florida Natural Areas Inventory, should jointly develop and establish a monitoring plan. Specifically, discussions should center on monitoring the effect of thinning (pre- and post-timber harvest) and prescribed and wildfires for three years during peak-flowering season. Several plots should be established within the proposed areas representing easy treatment condition, including control plots. Density, and growth and reproductive parameters will be monitored. Monitoring the long-term population dynamics at the

ramet level is also encouraged. An Annual report should be provided to the USFWS. This information will provide baseline data to related survival of these plants to the proposed activities, and will help streamline the Section 7 consultation of projects of similar scope and scale. (p. 39)

Forest Service staff have been working with Florida Natural Areas Inventory (FNAI) and USFWS staff to develop a monitoring plan to assess current conditions and evaluate the effects of timber harvest and post-harvest prescribed fire on *S. floridana*. From the 2012-2013 element occurrences, 19 sample sites were selected across a range of initial conditions and within both savanna restoration (residual BA of 10-40ft²/ac and intermediate thinning (residual BA of 50ft²/ac) treatments (Figure 1). This variation in initial conditions and proposed management will correspond with varying intensity of timber harvest to meet the desired tree density because sites with currently low tree density will experience less change in canopy structure and ground disturbance. Sampling design at each of the 19 sites will consist of 20m radius longleaf rapid assessment plots to assess overall habitat condition paired with more detailed vegetation inventory in 10m x 10m Carolina Vegetation Survey (CVS) plots that will include presence/absence and counts of flowering stems of *S. floridana* and any soil disturbances in 20 1m x 1m subplots (Figure 2). Both protocols are well-established and provide complimentary data on plant species composition and general environmental conditions.

Vegetative *S. floridana* can be difficult to detect and the species does not have a regular flowering phenology. Instead, the species has a strong flowering response following winter or spring fire. Therefore, the monitoring timeline has been designed to capture overall vegetation conditions and *S. floridana* flowering.

Initial vegetation sampling (estimated July 2016) – Establish sampling plots. Collect longleaf rapid assessment and CVS data, including presence of *S. floridana* in subplots if detectable. Note: these sites were visited in July 2016 and no flowering or vegetative *S. floridana* individuals were found.

Post-fire monitoring (est. spring 2017) – The entire compartment is scheduled to be burned in 2016. The *S. floridana* sub-plots will be sampled ~2-3mo following winter or spring fire to evaluate flowering response.

Post-harvest vegetation monitoring (est. summer 2019) - Collect longleaf rapid assessment and CVS data, including presence of *S. floridana* in subplots if detectable.

Post-harvest, post-fire monitoring (est. spring 2020) - The *S. floridana* sub-plots will be sampled ~2-3mo following fire to evaluate flowering response.

When combined with additional surveys for new *S. floridana* locations after harvest and prescribed fire, this plan would include information at multiple spatial scales and would allow rigorous assessment of how timber harvest effects a range of stand conditions, including changes in the distribution and number of *S. floridana* flowering stems. As such, although the primary motivation for this project is to monitor effects of project implementation, the results will contribute more broadly to the best available scientific information on wet savanna restoration and *S. floridana* response to timber harvest.

Figure 1. *S. floridana* element occurrences, proposed management and sample sites.

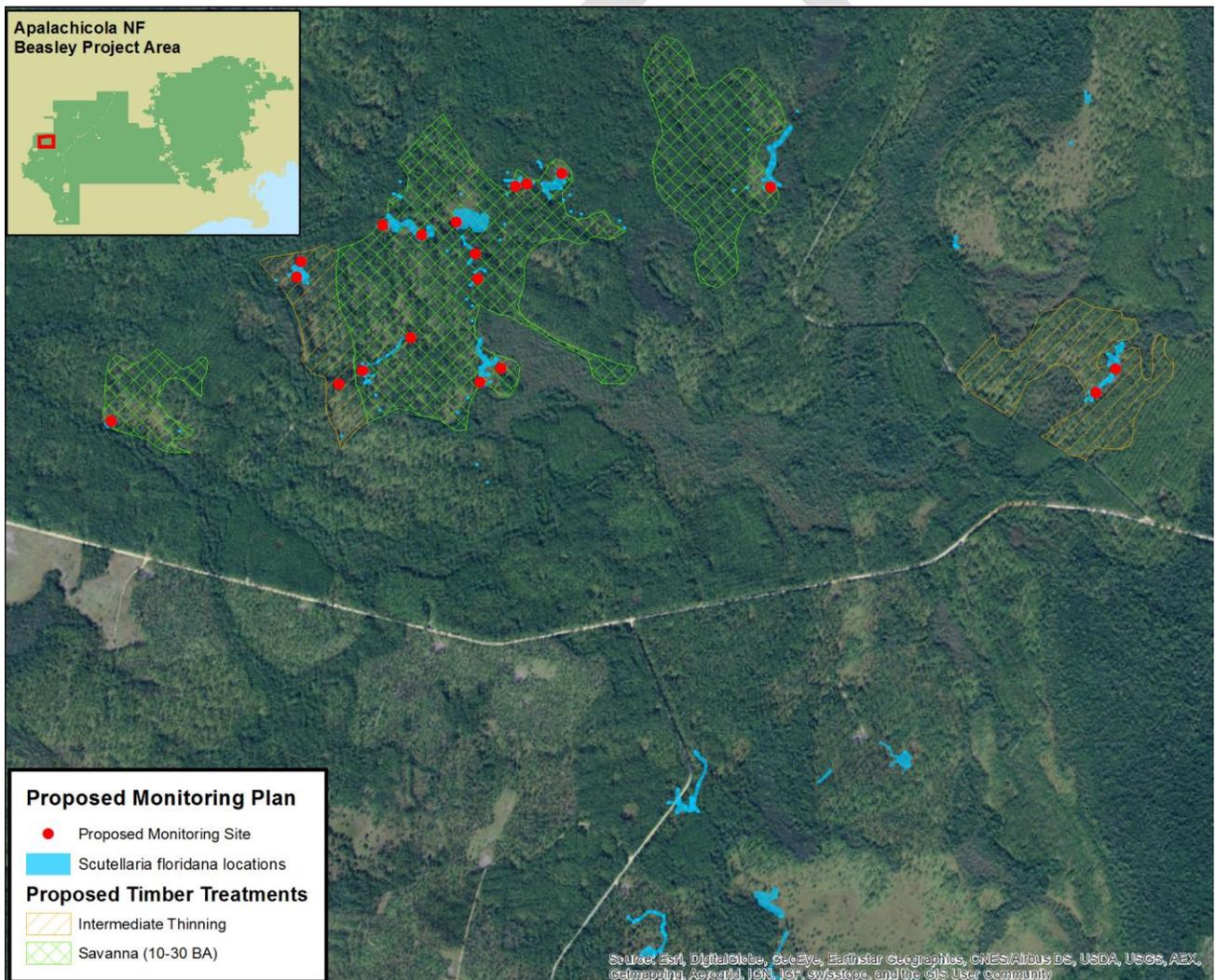


Figure 2. Sample plot layout showing longleaf rapid assessment (yellow circle), CVS plot with subplots (red square) within *S. floridana* EO (hashed blue area)

