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Forest Service

Southern Region

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Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan

Kisatchie National Forest

Record of Decision

INTRODUCTION

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This document is the public Record of Decision (ROD) that documents my decision and rationale for approving the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Kisatchie National Forest (Revised Forest Plan). The Revised Forest Plan will guide all resource management activities on the Forest for the next 10 to 15 years.

Over seventy years ago, the Kisatchie National Forest was cut over, fires raged uncontrolled, and erosion was common. It was during this time that Miss Caroline Dormon, now known as "The Mother of the Kisatichie", rose to the defense of these lands and a national forest was born. In 1930, these lands became part of the Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. Today, Forest visitors enjoy more than 600,000 acres of forested landscape and the Kisatchie is a favorite destination for native plant groups, birdwatchers, campers, off-road users, and a host of other exciting experiences.

The famed outdoor photographer, C.C. Lockwood, once called it the "land of the tall pines." As visitors travel the roads and trails of Louisiana's only national forest, their eyes are treated to a collage of colors, shapes, and textures forming the beautiful Kisatchie landscape. Louisiana's Native Plant Society contends that Kisatchie is a plant-lover's dream. One of the most floristically rich areas of the country, the Kisatchie supports an amazing number of native plants. From the lowland bogs to the longleaf pine hilltops, a profusion of tiny beautiful plants grow in this marvelous ecosystem.

The Kisatchie provides the glue that bonds the communities with the land. Partnerships with the National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Native American Tribes, and the Chambers of Commerce enhance the Kisatchie for all who visit. Unique among the many partnerships is the long-standing bond between the Forest Service and the military. The Army, Air Force, and Louisiana National Guard training on over 100,000 acres of the Kisatchie National Forest adds a dimension not seen on many other forests. This unique relationship lends another set of ears and eyes to hear the needs of the people and form a clear vision and direction for these lands.

This Forest Plan is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Resource Planning Act (RPA). The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires all forests in the National Forest System to develop plans that direct resource management activities on the forests. These plans are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10- to 15-year cycle. The first Land and Resource Management Plan for the Kisatchie National Forest was approved in November 1985.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Revised Forest Plan were developed according to the NFMA, its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508. The FEIS discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies and how they respond to issues and concerns.

This decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Kisatchie National Forest, located in Claiborne, Webster, Grant, Rapides, Natchitoches, Vernon, and Winn parishes of Louisiana. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the Forest are also considered.

MY DECISION

MY DECISION

I selected Alternative Modified D from the FEIS for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Kisatchie National Forest. By selecting Modified D, I am approving the Revised Forest Plan that describes in detail the goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, management area direction, suitable timberlands, rangelands, and minerals development for Modified D.

The Revised Forest Plan balances economic and resource values and recognizes the importance of all natural resources, as well as the continued availability of goods and services the public expects from the Forest. Although none of the alternatives considered would satisfy everyone completely, Alternative Modified D strikes a balance among competing interests to achieve the maximum net public benefits from forest resources in an environmentally sensitive manner. The Revised Forest Plan will:

- emphasize the restoration of naturally occurring forested landscapes and communities to sites they occupied prior to European settlement.
- reestablish the composition, structure, and processes associated with these ecosystems ensuring native biological diversity.
- improve site/species integrity, lower the risk of catastrophic losses from insects and disease, and improve the overall health of the Forest in the long-term.
- shape the landscape vegetation composition and patterns and reduce fuels using fire frequency, season of use, and intensity that approximates its natural occurrance.
- create habitat mosaics, conditions, and attributes most beneficial to native wildlife communities and provide conditions which sustain healthy, huntable populations of game species.
- designate five new botanical special interest areas (SIA), one scenic SIA, one geologic SIA; and expand one existing SIA.
- protect watersheds by designating over 183,000 acres of streamside habitat protection areas, which more than doubles that of current management.
- designate 81,000 acres of old-growth patches and an additional 215,000 acres of mid- to late-successional forest (wilderness, research natural areas, and streamside protection areas) providing effective habitat linkages and extensive areas of unfragmented habitats for plant and animal species on the Forest.
- be sensitive to local community needs by providing a sustainable flow of forest products with harvest levels which add to the local economy and contribute towards community stability.
- provide a balance of high quality dispersed and natural resource dependent developed recreation opportunities.
- promote a variety of recreation opportunity spectrum classes. While it emphasizes roaded natural and semiprimitive motorized opportunities, it also recognizes the importance of protecting sensitive resources and providing more areas for non-motorized use.
- emphasize use of existing corridors for access needs while reducing overall miles of open-roads on the Forest in the long-term.
- provide continued cooperation with the Department of Defense to restore WWII era military use areas and by providing a variety of geographic and topographic settings for military training with appropriate restrictions to protect the natural environment.
- provide opportunities for exploration and development of oil and gas resources while protecting sensitive habitats and streamside areas.

I believe the Revised Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and that this alternative can be implemented without reducing that capability. The Plan is responsive to the Forest Service's Natural Resource Agenda, and it meets our legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. The optimal implementation rate for the Revised Forest Plan could require higher funding levels in some areas than those currently allocated; however, I believe the management direction changes envisioned in the Revised Plan can be implemented under current budget levels. The attainment of desired conditions and outputs in some areas, however, may be prolonged or reduced if future budgets decrease.

COMPONENTS OF THE DECISION

A forest plan establishes a framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the Forest. A forest plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, by applying forestwide management direction, the forest plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.

The fundamental decisions I make in this **ROD** for the Revised Forest Plan are:

Establishment of forestwide multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11 (b))

These are found in Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan. The goals and objectives focus on achieving the desired future conditions (**DFCS**) of the Forest. The goals focus on direction for ecosystem restoration, conservation of biodiversity, sustainable forest management, maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitats, providing recreational opportunities, and contributing to social and economic health of local communities. The objectives provide specific outcomes for accomplishing the goals.

Establishment of forestwide management requirements (standards and guidelines) (36 CFR 219.27)

These are found in Chapter 2 of the Revised Forest Plan. Standards and guidelines that duplicate laws, policies, Forest Service Manual, and Forest Service Handbook direction were not included in order to simplify use of the Plan guidance and reduce printing costs. Only standards and guidelines needed to help achieve the goals and objectives of the Revised Forest Plan were included. I believe that the standards and guidelines provide adequate direction for management, provide for resource protection, and serve to illustrate the intent of the Revised Forest Plan. I do not expect the Revised Forest Plan to be able to predetermine needs under all conditions; I believe some latitude is necessary in adapting management to specific conditions. For this reason, guidelines are denoted separately from standards and may be applied with more discretion than standards.

Establishment of management areas and management area direction including desired future condition statements (36 CFR 219.11 (c))

These are found in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan. Land is allocated to 11 different management areas with management prescriptions designed to meet various desired future conditions. The management areas fall under these general categories: Forest Products, Amenity Values, Native Community Restoration, RCW/Native Community Restoration, RCW/Wildlife Habitats, Hardwoods, Military Intensive Use, National Scenic Rivers, National Wildlife Management Preserves, Palustris Experimental Forest, and Kisatchie Hills Wilderness. In some areas, such as wilderness, legal boundaries are specified by congressional acts. In others, boundaries are identified using ecological units, administrative boundaries, or other physical features.

*Determination of land that is suitable for timber production (36 CFR 219.14) and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (**ASQ**) of timber (36 CFR 219.16)*

The designation of suitable timberland is found in Chapter 3 and Appendix B of the Revised Forest Plan. Approximately 51 percent (308,889 acres) of the Forest is designated suitable for timber production.

The **ASQ** is found in Chapter 2 and Appendix A of the Revised Forest Plan. The Revised Forest Plan projects an average annual **ASQ** of 9.69 **MMCF** (million cubic feet) for the next 10 years. The present budget levels, along with a projected slight increase in operational costs, should provide sufficient funds to meet this **ASQ**.

Recommendations for non-wilderness allocations and recommendations for wilderness status (36 CFR 219.17)

No additional wilderness is recommended. The existing Kisatchie Hills Wilderness will be maintained. Appendix C of the **FEIS** presents a detailed description and effects analysis of the roadless and essentially undeveloped areas on the Forest for potential wilderness designation. This appendix includes an evalu-

COMPONENTS OF THE DECISION

ation of Cunningham Brake and Saline Bayou, two areas included in the 1979 RAREII inventory.

Saline Bayou RAREII area was determined to be ineligible for potential wilderness because the perpetuation of wilderness values could not be ensured due to the excessive acreage with outstanding mineral rights and the amount of improved roads within the area. Approximately 70 percent of the area within the boundary have outstanding mineral rights for perpetuity. Also, 19.38 miles of roads traverse the Saline Bayou RAREII area. This exceeds the criteria of no more than 1/2 mile of improved roads for each 1,000 acres.

Since its designation as a RAREII area, approximately 3,225 acres within the roadless area have been designated as a portion of the Saline Bayou National Scenic River corridor. Although designation as a national scenic river does not preclude wilderness designation, Saline Bayou and its corridor are managed with the goal of non-degradation and enhancement of values contributing to its national scenic river status.

Because the Saline Bayou RAREII area no longer meets the inventory criteria for wilderness areas east of the 100th meridian, as outlined in **Chapter 7.11b FSH 1909.12**, this area will be dropped from the roadless area inventory. The portion of the Saline Bayou RAREII area that is within the designated Saline Bayou National Scenic River corridor will continue to be managed and protected in accordance with the management plan for the scenic river and its corridor. Road closures, restrictions on use of off-road vehicles and cross-country travel within the scenic river corridor can be found in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan (page 3-35). The remaining portion of the Saline Bayou RAREII area will be managed for either mixed pine and hardwood restoration, as streamside or riparian areas, or as Saline Bayou Sandy Woodlands State Registry Area.

Cunningham Brake Roadless Area does meet the inventory criteria for potential wilderness and it was evaluated for its ability to meet the test of capability, availability, and need. Based on a lack of demonstrated demand or need for wilderness designation of Cunningham Brake Research Natural Area (RNA), the potential limitations on research opportunities associated with wilderness designation, and the fact that management under RNA designation would insure all roadless characteristics are protected, the area is not recommended for wilderness designation at this time. However, Cunningham Brake RNA will be closed year-round to motorized travel both off-roads and on trails (revised Plan, Chapter 2, page 2-36).

Recommendations for wild and scenic rivers or other special use designations as appropriate (36 CFR 219.17)

No additional wild and scenic rivers are recommended. The existing Saline Bayou National Scenic River Corridor will be maintained. Appendices D and E of the FEIS document the detailed evaluation and suitability analyses done by the Forest during the Revision process.

Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing (36 CFR 219.20)

Approximately 86,000 acres in 17 allotments may be used for domestic livestock grazing on the Catahoula, Calcasieu, and Kisatchie Ranger Districts (see figure 4-1 in the FEIS). Approximately 54,000 acres in 22 allotments either currently inactive or active, are planned for closure when current permittees waive their term grazing permits.

Determination of lands administratively available for oil and gas leasing (36 CFR 228.102 (d))

All federal lands on the Forest are administratively available for leasing except lands within the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness and those lands where the minerals are outstanding (to a third party) or reserved by the previous surface owner. Currently, approximately 591,000 acres are either available for leasing, under lease, or will be available, as existing leases expire or private mineral ownerships revert to the federal government. In minerals leases for lands potentially available for leasing, approximately 25,000 acres will require a No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulation, 131,000 acres will require a highly restrictive Controlled Surface Use (CSU**1**) stipulation, and 71,000 acres will require a moderately restrictive Controlled Surface Use (CSU**2**) stipulation.

Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11 (d))

These are found in Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan. Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to the Revised Forest Plan goals, desired future conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and specific regulatory requirements. These requirements ensure that my approach is adaptive and sustainability is being achieved or adjustments will be made.

ADDITIONAL DECISIONS

Reasonable and prudent measures were identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to minimize impacts of incidental take of RCWS (See ROD, page 26). The following guidelines have been modified or added to the revised Plan to implement these measures:

- FW-766: Protect all active cavity trees from fire during prescribed burning operations. Protection may involve any number of methods including, but not limited to: (1) raking around or back firing from the base of the tree, (2) using a "wet" line or foam line around the tree or entire cluster, and (3) mechanically removing vegetation. (KNF) (GUIDELINE)
- FW-847: Ensure all active cavity trees lost or any active cavities destroyed by prescribed fire will be replaced within 48 hours by installing the appropriate number of artificial cavities within suitable trees, weather permitting. (KNF) (GUIDELINE)
- FW-848: Conduct post-burn evaluations within 48 hours of a prescribed burn to inspect for damage to RCW cavity trees. Within two weeks of that evaluation, provide the Service's Lafayette Field Office with a written report of any cavity trees or cavities damaged, any known losses of nest cavities, eggs, nestlings, and/or adults, and remediation actions taken. (KNF) (GUIDELINE)
- FW-849: By January 31 of each year, report to the Service's Lafayette Field Office the total number of active clusters affected by the prescribed burn by Unit and/or District. The number of active cavity trees and active cavities destroyed by prescribed burning will also be reported, along with any known losses of nest cavities, eggs, nestlings, and/or adults. The number of artificial cavities installed to replace the losses will also be reported. If all of the above-mentioned data are contained within the annual monitoring report KNF supplies to the Service's RCW recovery coordinator each year, a copy of that report could be forwarded to the Lafayette Field Office in lieu of a separate report. (KNF) (GUIDELINE)
- FW-850: Upon locating a dead, injured, or sick individual of an endangered or threatened species, initial notification must be made to the Fish and Wildlife Service according to the terms outlined in Kisatchie NF's most current Endangered Species Act Section 10(a)(1)(A) permit. Care should be taken in handling sick or injured individuals and in the preservation of specimens in the best possible state for later analysis of cause of death or injury. (KNF) (GUIDELINE)

In addition, I am modifying portions of the following Regional direction for the Kisatchie National Forest :

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region **(RCW ROD)** (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995)

The revised Forest Plan (KNF PLAN) adds the following new guidance, specific to the Kisatchie National Forest:

- criteria for selecting areas for translocation (FW-754, KNF PLAN)
- mitigation for possible impacts from increased oil and gas development (FW-805, FW-806, and FW-810 through FW-817, KNF PLAN)
- emphasis to actively create long-term habitat beyond 1.5 miles of active RCW clusters inside the HMA (FW-830, FW-831, KNF PLAN)
- management area direction to concentrate restoration efforts beyond 1.5 miles of active RCW clusters within HMAS (MA-5-07, MA-6-07, KNF PLAN)

The revised Plan also adds the following clarifying guidance, specific to the Forest:

- when retaining the oldest 1/3 existing pine within a HMA (page 20, RCW ROD (APP. A)), retain the oldest "by compartment or portions of compartment" on existing pine acres "which may be potentially suitable nesting habitat (upland stands)" (FW-795, KNF PLAN)

ADDITIONAL DECISIONS

- exclude the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness from the Kisatchie HMA (page 10, RCW ROD (APP. A)) (FW-721 & MA-13-60, KNF PLAN)
- protect RCW cavity trees within the Wilderness during prescribed burning (MA-13-62, KNF PLAN)
- consider the potential number of suitable RCW habitat acres (page 24, RCW ROD (APP. A)) "regardless of their suitability for timber production" (FW-823, KNF PLAN)

The revised Plan implements the direction contained in Appendix A of the RCW ROD (RCW ROD (APP. A)), specific to the Kisatchie National Forest by:

- setting the population density objectives for the HMAS on the Forest (see page 4, RCW ROD (APP. A)), ranging from one group per 200 acres to one group per 400 acres depending on landtype-associated plant communities' capabilities or management limitations (FW-722, SMA-5CL-12, SMA-5CS-10, SMA-5CM-10, SMA-9DL-12, SMA-6BL-12, SMA-9DL-12, SMA-10DM-06, SMA-11DL-14, SMA-11DS-13, SMA-11DM-12, SMA-12D-06, KNF PLAN)
- identifying and establishing permanent recruitment stands (pages 9 and 10, RCW ROD (APP. A)) at a rate of 14 per year (FW-723, KNF PLAN)
- using rotations and regeneration acreage based upon management types represented on the Kisatchie (page 23-24 & 26, RCW ROD (APP. A); FW-822, FW-823, FW-828, SMA-5CL-08, SMA-5CS-06, SMA-5CM-06, SMA-6BL-08, SMA-9DL-07, SMA-11DL-09, SMA-11DS-08, SMA-11DM-07, SMA-12D-05, KNF PLAN)
- identifying group selection (page 24, RCW ROD (APP. A)) as the primary uneven-aged regeneration method to use for restoring shade intolerant and moderately shade intolerant tree species (FW-624, FW-824, KNF PLAN) on areas currently occupied by even-aged stands of off-site species, retaining relicts (FW-630, KNF PLAN)

The revised Plan makes minor modifications to the RCW ROD (APP. A) guidance, specific to the Kisatchie National Forest, by:

- allowing 50 square feet BA per acre minimum in mixed pine-hardwood managed areas (FW-798, FW-803, FW-820, SMA-5CS-09, SMA-5CM-09, KNF PLAN) instead of the 60-80 square feet per acre minimum BA within potential future nesting habitat (page 20, RCW ROD (APP. A)),
- prioritizing midstory control in clusters, replacement stands, and recruitment stands (pages 12 and 13, RCW ROD (APP. A)) to those within 1.5 miles of existing active RCW clusters (FW-727, KNF PLAN)
- allowing re-establishment of RCW groups even though all single-bird groups have not been successfully augmented (page 15, RCW ROD (APP. A); FW-756, KNF PLAN), based upon more current findings and recommendations from the USFWS
- prioritizing re-establishing RCW groups in HMAS (page 15, RCW ROD (APP. A)) to inactive clusters and recruitment stands within 1 mile of active clusters (FW-757, KNF PLAN)
- modifying the direction to establish a 3/4 mile radius circle around active clusters found outside of the HMA (page 5, RCW ROD (APP. A)); instead, apply management strategies and habitat improvement practices applicable to the HMA to the 200-400 acres around the active cluster site(s) (FW-781, FW-782, KNF PLAN)
- prioritizing RCW direct habitat improvements to cluster sites, recruitment stands, and replacement stands (pages 12-16, RCW ROD (APP. A)), to within 1.5 miles of an active RCW cluster (FW-783, KNF PLAN)
- allowing an increase in maximum regeneration patch size from 25 acres (page 25, RCW ROD (APP. A)) to 40 acres in MIL'S 3 and 4 if for longleaf restoration and beyond 1.5 miles of an active RCW cluster (FW-826, SMA-5CL-06, KNF PLAN)
- not allowing regeneration to the same desired tree species until after that species reaches rotation age (page 26, RCW ROD (APP. A); FW-829, KNF PLAN)
- using clearcutting with reserves (FW-833, FW-839, KNF PLAN), instead of clearcutting (page 27, RCW ROD (APP. A)), to restore longleaf and shortleaf pine

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont (VM ROD)(USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, February 1989)

The revised Plan adds the following clarifying guidance to the VM ROD, specific to the Forest:

- the appropriate methods of project-level inventory/surveys for TES species when con-

ducting biological evaluations (page A-1, Section I.A.(2) of the VM ROD) (FW-009, KNF PLAN)

The revised Plan also makes minor modifications to the management requirements located in Appendix A of the VM ROD, specific to the Kisatchie National Forest, by:

- utilizing the new scenery management system (SMS) terminology of scenic integrity objectives, or SIO'S, instead of visual quality objectives, or VQOS (see page A-4, VM ROD; FW-405 to FW-446, KNF PLAN)
- allowing use of blading and disking in addition to plowed firelines and recommending use of the least disturbing method (see page A-6, VM ROD; FW-083, KNF PLAN)
- adding more Kisatchie-specific prescribed fire guidance (FW-056, FW-057, FW-060, FW-062, FW-063, KNF PLAN) than that given on page A-7 of the VM ROD
- re-wording management requirement number 46 (page A-8, VM ROD) to specify allowing mechanical equipment only during dry conditions (FW-600, KNF PLAN) instead of specifying a 12 inch minimum depth to the water table
- adding specific direction prohibiting aerial application of Triclopyr herbicide within 300 feet, or ground application within 60 feet, of any occupied habitat of the Rafinesque's big-eared bat (FW-652, KNF PLAN)

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The following discussions summarize many of the important factors that I considered. They explain why I believe Alternative Modified D, as described in the FEIS, will maximize net public benefits when compared to the other alternatives.

The response of each alternative to the 13 significant issues was a major consideration in the decision to select Alternative Modified D. The reasons for choosing the Selected Alternative are discussed below on an issue by issue basis. Chapter 4 of the FEIS describes in detail the effects of expected management actions on the various Forest resources.

ISSUE #1: TIMBER SUPPLY

This issue deals with concerns over which lands are suitable for timber production, how coordination for other resources may affect timber harvest levels, and the effects of differing harvest levels on the local economy. Table 2-10 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives might respond differently to this issue during the first decade.

Concern about the amount of timber production from the Forest remains high. Public opinion continues to be divided on this issue. Many recognize that forestry is a leading industry in the State, and timber production has significant economic impacts in Louisiana and to local communities. Many also recognize increased benefits to the economy from management for resources such as recreation, tourism, and wildlife.

The Revised Forest Plan identifies approximately 308,889 acres as suitable for timber production. The average annual portion of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) will be 9.69 MMCF for the first decade, and is estimated to rise to 11.4 MMCF by the fifth decade in the planning horizon. Although higher than Alternatives C, E, and F and lower than Alternatives A, B, and D, its level of timber harvest will be similar to the level currently being produced on the Forest. The Selected Alternative was chosen because I believe it will therefore provide a sustainable flow of forest products to add to the local economy and contribute towards community stability while providing a high level of amenity resource outputs.

ISSUE #2: BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

This issue deals with concerns over what management direction is needed to maintain biological diversity on the Forest. More specifically, it deals with concerns over the allocation and direction for sensitive plant and animal communities and research natural areas; the management direction for threatened, endangered, sensitive, and conservation species; the restoration of naturally occurring forested landscapes, especially longleaf pine; the allocation of old growth; the effects of pinestraw collection; and the management direction for nonna-

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

tive vegetation on the Forest. Table 2-11 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to these issue facets during the first decade.

The Revised Forest Plan emphasizes the restoration of naturally occurring forested landscapes and communities. The use of the National Hierarchical Framework of Ecological Units in future project-level decision-making will provide land managers with a critical tool for assessing biological diversity at multiple scales.

Land allocation and management direction (standards and guidelines) will ensure the maintenance or improvement of the Forest's native biological diversity at the ecosystem, landscape, and community levels. Fire frequency, season of use, and intensity will be used to shape landscape vegetation composition and patterns on approximately 105,000 acres per year.

Vegetation management will maintain an appropriate mixture of seral stages within the Forest's four major landscape communities. Approximately 81,000 acres of the Forest will be designated and managed as medium-sized (500 to 2,500 acres) old-growth patches representing all potential native old-growth forest community types, distributed across the ecological units of the Forest, and interconnected by corridors of mid- to late-successional forests. These patches, 13% of the total forested acreage on the Forest, are not considered to be suitable for timber production. In addition, 215,000 acres of mid- to late-successional forest such as wilderness, research natural areas, and streamside areas that contain attributes characteristic of old-growth, will exist on other lands not suitable for timber production.

Five new botanical special interest areas (SIAS), one scenic SIA, and one geological SIA, will be designated. In addition, one existing scenic SIA will be expanded.

The use of native, or short-lived desirable non-native plant species is emphasized. Land allocation and management direction (standards and guidelines) will allow limited pinestraw collection while protecting soil productivity and biological diversity.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide an acceptable amount and mix of old-growth areas and special interest areas without significantly affecting the Forest's ability to produce or protect other resources. Alternative C would provide more old-growth patch allocation but would significantly reduce the Forest's ability to respond to the other issues.

ISSUE #3: LAND USE

This issue deals with concerns over establishment of priorities for land acquisitions involving wetlands, rare or sensitive natural communities or species; management direction for former military camps; coordinating special uses with other resources; and increased military intensive use on the Vernon Unit of the Calcasieu District.

Guidelines in the Revised Forest Plan establish three priority levels for land acquisition. Management direction is included for the former military camps and special uses' coordination with other resources.

A memorandum of agreement (MOA) signed by the Secretaries of Agriculture and Army directed the preparation of an appropriate environmental analysis examining more intensive use on some or all of the 45,000 acres of military limited use land in the Vernon Unit of the Calcasieu District. The public scoping and environmental analysis process is underway, and potential impacts to the environment will be disclosed in a separate environmental document. That document will consider the effects to the Revised Plan's management direction and changes to the environmental effects expected in this FEIS along with site-specific environmental effects to the areas being affected. That decision is not expected to occur until the latter part of 1999.

The Selected Alternative will provide the Department of Defense a variety of geographic and topographic settings to conduct military training activities. This is consistent with the long history of military use on the Forest.

Many Forest inholders have been civilian employees of Fort Polk, which still provides thousands of jobs for the local community. Many community members in the towns of Leesville and DeRidder see the Army and Forest Service relationship as a means of preserving their way of life and economic future. The use of Fort Polk as a training facility also has an indirect economic impact on the England Air Park facility in Alexandria. This facility is owned by the city of Alexandria whose economy benefits significantly from the military contract.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The Forest Service works closely with the Air Force providing a sophisticated targeting area for A-10 jets maneuvering over the Forest's Claiborne Bombing Range on the Calcasieu Ranger District. This area has been used for many years and is near old Camp Claiborne, a World War II Camp. Camp Claiborne and another **WWII** camp, Camp Livingston, are also used by the Louisiana Army National Guard. Many hazards as well as historical artifacts exist in these **WWII** areas and restoration is a long-term goal.

Cooperation between the Forest and the military has also led to improved Forest inventories of archeological resources and threatened and endangered species habitat. The long history of past military use of the northern portion of the Vernon Unit has resulted in one of the finest, large areas of open longleaf forested landscapes found anywhere. The Kisatchie/Fort Polk **RCW** population is the third largest population in the country and is a donor population providing woodpeckers to other forests. Continued cooperation is expected to result in gains for both agencies, with no signficant adverse effects to the natural environment and providing stability to local economic and social communities. This is consistent with overall objectives for national forest lands.

ISSUE #4: MINERALS DEVELOPMENT

This issue deals with internal and public concerns over the extent of opportunities for minerals development, and the modification of management direction for oil, gas, and common variety minerals on the Forest. Table 2-12 in the **FEIS** displays how the alternatives vary in response to this issue.

Under the Revised Forest Plan, all federal lands except Kisatchie Hills Wilderness would be available for leasing. No additional areas are withdrawn from leasing. Because most of the Forest land was acquired, the United States has varying degrees of ownership of mineral rights and control of surface operations related to mineral extraction. The Forest is currently reviewing mineral title records on all its lands to verify ownership. Litigation involving ownership of certain mineral rights and the United States' interpretation of the Louisiana statutes governing mineral prescription is on-going. A final mineral ownership determination is unlikely until that litigation is complete.

Exploration and development will be allowed in most management areas. A No Surface Occupancy (**NSO**) lease stipulation would be applied on leased lands, if larger than 40 acres, that are administrative sites, Research Natural Areas, State Registry Natural Areas, Special Interest Areas, the Johnson Tract experimental forest, the Air Force Bombing and Gunnery Range, the Breezy Hill No-Entry Area, scenic areas, within 600 feet of the Saline Bayou National Scenic River, cultural resource sites, the Stuart Seed Orchard, jurisdictional wetlands, and developed recreation areas.

A highly restrictive Controlled Surface Use (**CSU1**) stipulation would be applied to all Streamside Habitat Protection Zones (**SHPZS**) on the Forest (varying in width from 50 feet to 150 feet, depending upon the adjacent management area theme), to the extent of the Riparian Area Protection Zones (**RAPZS**) within Louisiana pearlshell mussel sub-watersheds, and to the extent of **RAPZS** within management area 2 (amenity emphasis).

A moderately restrictive Controlled Surface Use (**CSU2**) stipulation would be applied to areas outside of **SHPZS** within the Breezy Hill No-Ground-Penetration area, the remainder of management area 2, the remainder of Forest **RAPZS**, within 2,000 feet of the Longleaf Trail Scenic Byway, the U.S. Marshall Service Use Area, the Longleaf Tract experimental forest, and inside the Claiborne Safety Fan area.

Management direction (standards and guidelines) will ensure an efficient and effective leasing process while minimizing potential effects to other resources.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide an acceptable amount of opportunity for exploration and development of oil and gas resources without significantly affecting the Forest's ability to produce or protect other resources. Through mitigation, sensitive habitat, streamside areas, special interest areas, and scenic areas would be protected while still allowing the Forest and local community to benefit from the sale and lease of minerals on most of the Forest. Alternative C would not allow leasing of federal lands for mineral development. Alternatives A and B would allow more leasing opportunity but less protection to sensitive areas.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

ISSUE #5: RANGE/GRAZING

This issue deals with concerns over the impact of the elimination of the range management program, the amount of lands allocated to range development, and livestock impacts on plant and animal communities on the Forest.

Trends indicate the continuation of a steady decline in grazing on the Forest. In the Revised Forest Plan 86,000 acres in 17 allotments will be available for domestic livestock grazing. Approximately 54,000 acres in 22 allotments that are either currently inactive or active but planned for closure when current permittees waive their term grazing permits, would be closed and dropped from the inventory of grazing allotments. Mitigation measures that discourage grazing of riparian areas by attracting livestock away from areas by feeding, salting, and the use of prescribed fire should adequately protect riparian areas and minimize impacts to other resources.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide an acceptable amount and distribution of range forage, adequate to meet an expected low demand within the next 10 to 15 years. It thus minimizes program cost to maintain a lowering need. Conflicts with other resources such as trail use and sensitive habitat, can also be reduced or eliminated. All alternatives except Alternative A (no action) respond similarly to this issue.

ISSUE #6: RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER

This issue deals with concerns over what Forest direction is needed to manage habitat for the endangered RCW. It deals with concerns over how much of the Forest should be allocated to RCW management; what types of habitat improvements are needed; how RCW clusters and habitat within the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness should be managed; and what southern pine beetle suppression activities should be allowed within RCW habitat areas. Table 2-13 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

In the Revised Forest Plan, the Forest will be managing for the RCW in accordance with direction provided by the *Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (June 1995). Five Habitat Management Areas (HMAS), encompassing approximately 303,000 acres of pine and pine-hardwood stands have been established. The Forest's population objective will be 1,405 active RCW clusters. The present population contains 363 active clusters.

Wilderness clusters are not included within an HMA. Prescribed natural fire and management-ignited fire would be allowed in the Wilderness to maintain fuel loadings at a level that reduces, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire occurring within or escaping from the Wilderness. As a result, Wilderness clusters will indirectly benefit from prescribed natural fire and management-ignited prescribed fire within the Wilderness. Land allocations and management direction (standards and guidelines) will provide land managers with a range of activities and practices designed to aid in the recovery of the RCW while allowing management for other resources, including the restoration of naturally occurring forested landscapes. This management strategy will result in a mosaic of habitats for a wide variety of vegetation and wildlife species and communities.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because, like the other alternatives, it fully implements the direction given in the *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (RCW ROD) (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995) and will provide an acceptable amount and distribution of RCW foraging and nesting habitat within the HMAS by considering population density based upon landscape community potential. In addition, it provides more short-term and long-term longleaf pine habitat through active restoration of longleaf pine than in the other action alternatives. Alternative A (no action) could provide more, but only because it does not allocate any HMA acreage to old-growth management.

ISSUE #7: RECREATION

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

This issue deals with concerns over what variety of outdoor recreation experiences should be provided on the Forest and how they may affect the local community. Particularly, it deals with concerns over use of off-road vehicles; the need for additional recreational experiences and facilities; the management of trail corridors; designation of additional wilderness and wild & scenic rivers; and the effects of recreational activities on the local economy. Table 2-14 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

The recreation management program will focus on providing nature-based outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural-appearing forest of high ecological integrity. Providing a balance of high quality dispersed and natural resource dependent developed recreation opportunities will be the top recreation priority. Forest visitors will be provided enhanced opportunities to derive maximum benefit from restored historic vegetation. Long-term public recreation interests will be protected by maintaining and enhancing open space options, public accessibility, heritage, wilderness, scenic, and natural resource values. New sites will be considered if strong demand is indicated and the improvements would support or enhance natural resource dependent recreation. Recreation opportunities that encourage the study and enjoyment of nature and scenery , highlight the importance of conservation, and instill appreciation of the nation's history and heritage will be featured. Interpretation of unique and historical biological communities will be a priority. Tables 4-18 and 4-19 of the FEIS list by District priority recreation area construction and reconstruction projects and trail construction and reconstruction projects.

A variety of recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) classes will be available; with greatest emphasis on roaded natural and semiprimitive motorized opportunities. In recent years, demand for off-road vehicle (ORV) riding opportunities has increased on the Forest. This has been attributed to the increase in leasing of large private land tracts for hunting purposes. Public lands have become among the few remaining areas where ORV enthusiasts can pursue their sport. Historically, the Kisatchie has been generally open to off-road vehicle use unless designated as closed because of the nearly level to gently rolling terrain that predominates on the Forest. In order to provide an adequate range of recreation opportunities that meet the expected public demand for off-road use without significantly impacting others' need for solitude and enjoyment of nature and scenery, the management direction for the Selected Alternative reduces off-road use on the Forest to 78%. The remaining 22% will be closed year-round or seasonally. Currently the Forest has approximately 85% of its area open to off-road use.

Areas with seasonal or year-round closures will include all developed recreation sites, research natural areas, special interest areas, sensitive habitat protection areas, Saline Bayou National Scenic River corridor, Kisatchie Hills Wilderness, designated walk-in hunting areas, Stuart Seed Orchard, Breezy Hill No-Entry Area, U.S. Marshall Service use area, military intensive-use areas, and other areas closed as needed by order of the Forest Supervisor. Table 4-13 of the FEIS lists the areas and acreages closed to ORVs. ORV use will be monitored to ensure that other resource and ecological values are being protected. No new wilderness or national wild and scenic river designations are proposed.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide an acceptable amount and distribution of both developed and dispersed recreational opportunities, adequate to meet demand within the next 10 to 15 years. It's anticipated program cost is slightly higher than current, but based upon demand predictions, is needed to supply an increasing need. The Selected Alternative proposes more high-priority trail construction than any of the other alternatives. Conflicts with other resources such as sensitive habitats and soil and water protection are minimized or eliminated. The other alternatives propose more or less recreation construction projects and proportionately higher or lower program costs, depending upon alternative Forest emphases.

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ISSUE #8: RIPARIAN

This issue deals with concerns over what management direction is needed to designate and protect riparian/wetland areas on the Forest. It deals with concerns over the width of streamside management zones; management direction needed to protect riparian associated values, including the Louisiana pearlshell mussel; and management direction needed for State natural and scenic streams that traverse the Forest. Table 2-15 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

In the Revised Forest Plan, streamside and riparian area protection zones (SHPZS and RAPZS) and appropriate management practices within them, have been established for the Forest to protect or enhance riparian associated resource values and characteristics. These zones provide:

- Important wildlife habitat components (key areas) such as hard and soft mast producers, water, snags and den trees, edge, and a variety of foods and cover;
- Unique habitats for a broad diversity of plants, some of which are rare, uncommon, sensitive, or restricted to a more moist, cooler environment;
- Vegetative cover for aquatic habitats;
- Corridors between habitat components within the home range of some species of wildlife and important travel routes for non-game birds during migration; and,
- Genetic flow between potentially isolated populations in adjacent mature stands, thereby helping to maintain population genetic viability.

Dependent upon individual management area goals and objectives, assigned minimum SHPZ width will be 50, 100, or 150 feet on each side of stream channels. Streamside protection areas will encompass about 183,800 acres. Land allocations and management direction (standards and guidelines) provide coordination requirements for activities along State natural and scenic rivers, and protection measures for the Louisiana pearlshell mussel.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide an acceptable amount of streamside protection and riparian habitat enhancement opportunities (more than twice the acreage of current management) without severely affecting the Forest's ability to produce or protect other resources. Alternatives C, D, E, and F would provide more acres devoted to streamside management, but would proportionately reduce the Forest's ability to respond to the other issues and would provide only minor gains in soil and water protection or riparian habitat improvement.

ISSUE #9: FOREST ROADS

This issue deals with concerns over what management direction is needed to manage and maintain the road system on the Forest and what effects may occur to other resources. Table 2-16 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to this issue during the first decade.

For the Revised Plan, road density across the Forest varies, with the Forestwide average at approximately 3.5 miles of road per square mile. The Forest has the jurisdiction and authority to control 2.4 miles of road per square mile. The Forest's collector road system is in place and there are no plans to add additional collector roads. Local roads will be developed, improved, maintained and managed to meet the demand for limited or intermittent access, and minimum design-standard roads will be constructed. The Forest will stress using or improving existing corridors to minimize the miles of new road construction. Road closures will be used to meet management area and sub-management area goals and objectives including wildlife, soil, and water protection or other resource needs. Over time, the combination of road closures and intermittent use will result in a slow decrease in overall open-road density on the Forest. Management direction (standards and guidelines) will provide land managers with planning and inventory, construction and reconstruction, and operations, maintenance, and decommissioning strategies to provide effective access to the Forest while protecting other resources.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide the minimum amount of roads needed to provide access for resource management while adequately protecting sensitive areas. It assigns more roads to either a primitive or non-motorized recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) than any

of the other alternatives. It recognizes the importance of providing more areas for non-motorized use by permanently or temporarily closing roads within designated sensitive resource areas.

ISSUE #10: PRESCRIBED BURNING

This issue deals with concerns over what management direction is needed to achieve management goals using prescribed fire on the Forest. More specifically, it deals with concerns over the extent and seasonal use of prescribed fires on the general forest, within the HMAs, within the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness, and within the wildlife management preserves; and the use of plow lines in conjunction with prescribed burning practices. Table 2-17 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

Over the past 5 years the Forest applied prescribed fire on about 72,119 acres annually. In the Revised Forest Plan, prescribed fire will be allowed on approximately 105,000 acres each year. Management-ignited fire will be conducted during dormant and growing seasons. The use of growing season burns will be emphasized in upland longleaf pine landscapes, and will be allowed on approximately 21,000 acres each year. Prescribed fire frequencies will vary depending upon management area and sub-management area goals and objectives, and will generally range from 2-5 years in longleaf pine, 5-10 years in shortleaf pine / oak-hickory, and 10-20 years in mixed hardwood-loblolly pine landscapes. No fire frequency is established for riparian forest landscapes. The use of plow lines will be lessened with increased emphasis given to natural fire breaks, existing roads, disked lines, and other alternate methods. Prescribed natural fire and management-ignited prescribed fire will be utilized within the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness. Land allocations and management direction (standards and guidelines) provide for the protection of Forest resources while meeting ecosystem restoration objectives.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will utilize fire to fully implement the direction provided in the RCW ROD and will provide an acceptable amount and distribution of fire disturbance in landscape communities that are fire-dependent. It will therefore provide the means to effectively produce short-term and long-term restoration in upland longleaf and shortleaf pine communities. Like Alternative D, the Selected Alternative will utilize both management-ignited and lighting-ignited prescribed fire within the Kisatchie Hills Wilderness to reduce fuel loads — indirectly improving conditions for fire-maintained plant and animal communities currently in the Wilderness.

ISSUE #11: SILVICULTURE

This issue deals with concerns over which silvicultural systems and management practices should be used on the Forest and what effects they may have on other resources. It deals with concerns over use of the uneven-aged silvicultural system and its effects; rotation ages, regeneration methods, and site preparation methods for even-aged management and its effects; effects on landscape ecology; methods and practices for managing bottomland hardwood and within-stand hardwoods; and use of herbicides and their effects on other Forest resources. Table 2-18 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

The Revised Forest Plan will allow the use of even-aged, two-aged, and uneven-aged silvicultural systems. Approximately 32,000 acres of the Forest will be managed in designated patches at the landscape level, using the uneven-aged system. Land allocations and management direction (standards and guidelines) will provide land managers with a range of regeneration methods and vegetation management methods to achieve a mixture of desired future conditions.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide the appropriate silvicultural guidance needed to develop both even-aged, two-aged, and uneven-aged forested stands in the amount and proportion needed to fully address the needs of the Forest. It uses appropriate techniques to provide restoration of native landscape plant communities in a relatively short period of time (compared to the other alternatives), provides direction to achieve long-term goals for plant and animal habitat improvement, utilizes appropriate techniques to develop uneven-aged stands from a predominantly

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MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

even-aged forest, and provides methods for developing and maintaining both even-aged and uneven-aged mixed forest stands.

ISSUE #12: WILDLIFE AND FISH

This issue deals with concerns about the management direction needed to provide diverse wildlife and fish habitat on the Forest. Specifically, it deals with concerns over the direction for the two wildlife management preserves; habitat management direction for game and non-game species, including neotropical migratory birds; management direction for the spatial arrangement of upland hardwood species; and the choice of ecological and management indicators to effectively monitor habitat health and response to management on the Forest. Table 2-19 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

A goal of the Revised Forest Plan is to provide for biologically diverse ecosystems which support viable populations of all native and desirable nonnative wildlife and fish species and to conserve threatened, endangered, and rare species. Management area and sub-management area direction (standards and guidelines) will be used to create and manage habitat mosaics, conditions, and attributes most beneficial to native wildlife communities and to provide conditions which sustain healthy, huntable populations of game species within the two preserves. Thirty plant, twenty animal, and seven aquatic management indicator species have been identified and will be used to monitor implementation of the Revised Forest Plan. Management indicators are identified in Chapter 3 of the FEIS (Pages 3-28, 3-29, 3-42 to 3-45, and 3-49), and in Chapter 5 of the Revised Forest Plan (pages 5-15 to 5-19). A summary of the species viability analysis can be found in Appendix J of the FEIS.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide the best combination of management practices needed to restore native wildlife habitats in a relatively short period of time and because the spatial arrangement of protected streamside areas and old-growth will provide a contiguous corridor of unfragmented habitat for those species that need it. It also provides adequate protection of watersheds and aquatic habitats through its use of streamside habitat protection zones (SHPZS) and riparian area protection zones (RAPZS) without severely reducing the opportunity for the enhancement of other resources.

ISSUE #13: FOREST HEALTH

This issue deals with concerns over the improvement of forest health on the Forest, especially protection from insects and diseases. Table 2-20 in the FEIS displays how the alternatives may respond to some of these issue facets during the first decade.

Through the implementation of management direction (standards and guidelines) the Revised Forest Plan seeks to manage for productive and healthy forest ecosystems by using comprehensive integrated approaches to prevent and minimize resource losses or damage due to insects and disease.

The Selected Alternative was chosen because it will provide the best combination of management practices needed to restore native landscape plant communities and habitats within a relatively short period of time, improving overall forest health. Restoration of longleaf pine and mixed pine-hardwood stands to sites now occupied by loblolly pine will reduce the risk of significant losses in the future from southern pine beetle epidemics. Increased prescribed burning will restore native understory and overstory ecosystems, reduce brownspot disease in longleaf seedlings, reduce fuel loadings that could cause damaging wildfires, and increase forestwide biodiversity through the development of both young and old forest seral stages.

MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

In addition to the planning issues and public comments, the following factors were considered in making my decision:

- Consistency with applicable laws, policies, manual, and handbook direction that govern the development of a Forest Plan and management of national forest lands.
- Protection of the basic resources (air, soil, and water).

- Maintenance, restoration, sustainability of ecosystem composition, structure, and function.
- Conservation of elements of diversity, such as declining natural communities and uncommon biological, geological, or ecological sites.
- Promotion of rural economic development and a quality rural environment.
- The effects on the people who use and depend on forest resources.
- Consistency with plans and policies of local, State, and other national government agencies.
- Protection of threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant and animal species.
- Operational and budget needs to fully implement the Plan decision.

ALTERNATIVES

Six alternatives were analyzed in detail in the DEIS. Seven are considered in detail in the FEIS, including Alternative Modified D, the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. Four additional alternatives (listed on page R-15) were considered but eliminated from detailed study for reasons given in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. All alternatives considered in detail meet minimum legal and environmental standards. The management theme for each of the alternatives is provided below. Distinguishing characteristics and acreage allocated for the management and sub-management areas are provided in more detail on pages 2-17 through 2-37 of the FEIS. A detailed discussion of the environmental effects for the alternatives considered in detail are included in Chapter 4 of the FEIS.

ALTERNATIVE A (NO CHANGE)

This alternative represented implementation of the original 1985 Forest Plan, as amended, including emphasis on the restoration of longleaf, shortleaf, or other desirable native pine species within tentative Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) habitat management areas (HMAS). It served as a basis for comparison with the other alternatives. Under this alternative, the Forest would have been intensively managed to provide a moderate output of commodity resources and a moderately high output of non-commodity benefits.

ALTERNATIVE B

This alternative placed more emphasis on the production of forest products. Less emphasis was placed on non-market values. The allocation of compatible management area DFCS in this alternative theme would have provided moderate levels of timber harvest while minimizing costs.

ALTERNATIVE C

This alternative emphasized the enhancement of non-commodity or amenity values, such as recreation, visual quality, and plant and wildlife habitats. The allocation of compatible management area DFCS in this alternative theme would have provided a wide range of recreational opportunities, scenic quality, and a mixture of plant and animal habitats. Timber would have been produced at a relatively low level and all federal lands on the Forest would have been withdrawn from mineral leasing as existing leases expired.

ALTERNATIVE D (DRAFT PREFERRED)

This was my preferred alternative in the DEIS. It emphasized restoration of natural plant communities to sites they occupied before European settlement. The allocation of compatible management area DFCS in this alternative would have worked towards reestablishing the composition, structure, and processes associated with these forested ecosystems. Commodity and amenity resource outputs from actions such as off-site species conversion, prescribed burning and frequent stand improvement practices, would have been relatively high under this alternative.

SELECTED ALTERNATIVE (MODIFIED D)

This is my selected alternative and is developed in detail in the Revised Forest Plan. Like the original Alternative D, it emphasizes restoration of natural plant communities to sites they occupied before European settlement. Its allocation of compatible management area DFCS works towards establishing the composition, structure, and processes associated with these forested ecosystems. This modification of the original alternative adds more areas of old growth and Special Interest Areas; more mitigation for effects from minerals operations; a more accurate analysis of lands available for timber production (i.e. timber suitability); and clarification of many standards and guidelines proposed in the original Alternative D.

ALTERNATIVE E

This alternative emphasized the management of hardwoods and mixed stands of hardwoods and pines. The allocation of management area DFCS focused on increasing the number of hardwood stands, mixed stands, and hardwoods within pine stands to provide enhanced visual quality, hard mast production, and wildlife habitat. Commodity outputs would have been provided at moderate levels.

ALTERNATIVE F

This alternative placed emphasis on the establishment or improvement of wildlife habitat for a full range of native species. The allocation of management area DFCS focused on providing habitat conditions and attributes necessary to maintain viable populations of all native game and non-game species. Commodity and amenity resource outputs would have been created and maintained at moderate levels, at the landscape level.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

MAXIMUM SUSTAINABLE ANNUAL REVENUE

This alternative would have maximized the sustainable annual revenue from all sources of goods and services provided from the Forest.

MAXIMUM BIOLOGICAL FOR TIMBER PRODUCTION

This alternative would have produced timber to the maximum biological potential of the land.

BASED ON 1985 REGIONAL WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

Management for the RCW would have been based on the direction given in the *1985 Regional Wildlife Management Handbook*.

BASED ON RPA REGIONAL RESOURCE OBJECTIVES

This alternative would have incorporated the RPA program tentative resource objectives for each national forest as displayed in the Regional Guide.

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the "environmentally preferable" alternatives as:

"...the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources."

Alternative C is the environmentally preferable alternative. It would schedule the least amount of timber harvest, associated road development, and involve the least human-induced change to the natural environment. Consequently, of all the alternatives considered in detail, it would have the fewest adverse effects on the biological and physical environment.

Even though Alternative C is preferable from the standpoint of the physical and biological environment, I believe Alternative Modified D provides for a better balance of resource uses and maximizes the net public benefit while protecting the environment. The Selected Alternative is also more responsive to concerns of local communities for economic stability and achieves a better overall balance of the economic concerns with the environmental issues. Some of the components of Alternative C are incorporated in the Selected Alternative, such as full protection of streamside and riparian areas, designated old-growth areas, and improved recreation opportunities.

Alternative Modified D incorporates appropriate environmental safeguards to minimize potential adverse effects to the biological and physical environment. In addition, this alternative maintains options for the next 10 to 15 years that will allow the Forest to respond to many of the issues addressed in Alternative C. Features of the Selected Alternative such as evaluating remaining old-growth for relative values and locating and scheduling harvests that minimize fragmentation will allow the Forest to adapt and incorporate new scientific findings over the next 10 years while providing a stable supply of timber for local economic stability. The Selected Alternative provides more flexibility than Alternative C to manage habitats for a variety of wildlife species, including threatened and endangered species, and those which need abundant early successional habitat as well as those that prefer abundant older successional habitat. Also, the Selected Alternative would provide opportunities to improve overall forest health by effectively restoring native plant communities and lessening potential losses to insects and disease.

NET PUBLIC BENEFITS

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

NET PUBLIC BENEFITS

The 1982 National Forest Management Act (**NFMA**) implementing regulations (**36 CFR 219.1**) state that forest plans must "...provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner." Net public benefits can be defined as the overall value to the Nation of all outputs (benefits) and positive effects, less all associated inputs (costs) and negative effects, whether they can be quantitatively valued or not.

A component of determining net public benefits is the Present Net Value (**PNV**), which is used to measure the economic efficiency of each alternative. A comparison of the alternatives' **PNVs**, is shown in Table B-17 of the **FEIS**. As shown in the table, the current (or "no change") alternative, Alternative D, and Alternative B, have higher **PNVs** than the Selected Alternative. However, **PNV** does not include all costs and benefits. Some of the important non-priced benefits include ecosystem diversity; habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species; water quality; and scenic quality. Since **PNV** does not reflect the values of these benefits, nor the costs associated with negative effects on them, it was not the only criterion I used in my decision.

I believe that the Selected Alternative provides direction to manage the Forest to produce goods, services, and use opportunities in a way that maximizes net public benefits. Based on the preceding discussions it is clear that Alternative Modified D does not have the least impact on the environment nor does it generate as many market valued commodities as other alternatives considered in the **FEIS**. However, I believe the Selected Alternative achieves a balance between the economic benefits and environmental issues and concerns voiced by the public. I believe the Selected Alternative will increase public benefits by moving the Forest towards improved forest health through its emphasis on restoring native landscape diversity and through its special attention to providing functional old-growth ecosystems and unique plant and animal habitats. I am also confident that the management proposed in the Revised Forest Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and can be accomplished without reducing that capability.

COMPATIBILITY WITH GOALS OF OTHER PUBLIC AGENCIES AND INDIAN TRIBES

The Revised Forest Plan has been developed with public participation that included involvement, coordination, and comments from federal, State, and local agencies including:

- The U.S. Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service (**USFWS**)
- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (**EPA**)
- The Natural Resource Conservation Service (**NRCS**)
- The Department of Defense (**DOD**)
- The Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (**BLM**)
- The Department of Transportation (**DOT**)
- The Federal Highway Administration (**FHA**)
- The National Park Service (**NPS**)
- The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (**LDWF**)
- The Louisiana Natural Heritage Program (**LNHP**)
- The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (**LDEQ**)
- The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (**LDAF**)
- The Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer (**SHPO**)
- The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (**ACHP**)

In addition, representatives of parish and city governments, industry groups, special interest groups, and individuals were contacted and solicited for comments. A complete listing of all persons contacted and comments received can be found in Appendices A and K of the **FEIS**.

No lands administered by the Kisatchie are involved with special treaties and no tribal lands are commingled or immediately adjacent to national forest. However, I believe Alternative Modified D is compatible with and complementary to the goals of local Native American tribes. Several federally recognized Louisiana tribes have expressed great interest in communicating with the Forest, especially regarding technical assistance or technology transfer.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The Selected Alternative would not disproportionately affect minority or low-income Forest communities. While some lessening of forest products outputs, such as timber volumes, would occur, a sustainable mix of goods and services would continue in the long-term.

Of any Forest area, minority or low-income communities could be most affected on the Caney District (Webster and Claiborne Parishes), simply because these two parishes have the highest percentage of minorities and low-income or unemployed families when compared with other parishes containing national forest land. In addition, under the Selected Alternative, 24% or 6,920 acres of the District's 32,000 landbase would be designated and managed as native old-growth community patches, which is the highest percentage, per District, on the Forest. However, this would be offset by the fact that much of the proposed old-growth areas on the Caney District have current and future recreational and amenity values.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULES AND BUDGETS

The Revised Forest Plan will be implemented through a series of project-level decisions based on site-specific environmental analysis and public involvement. The Revised Forest Plan seeks to guide determination of management activities and projects by establishing a clear desired future condition for the Forest and for each management area, rather than by establishing schedules for actions. This approach should leave more flexibility for managers to adapt program and project selection as changes take place in budgets, resource capabilities, and management priorities.

Those projects recognized in the implementation guides and strategies in the Revised Forest Plan in Chapter 4 and in the probable outputs listed in Appendix A, are projections of probable outcomes. They were used to indicate approximate scheduling and practices and estimate the likely environmental effects of following the direction provided by the Revised Forest Plan.

The Revised Forest Plan purposefully avoids determining activity schedules. It addresses the estimated budget in Appendix A, rather than within the Revised Forest Plan itself, in an effort to decrease the need for future amendments based solely upon scheduling and budget changes.

During implementation, specific projects and activities will be proposed and analyzed. These analyses will be documented in the appropriate NEPA documents, i.e., Environmental Assessments, Environmental Impact Statements, or categorical exclusions. Projects, practices, and activities will be designed to achieve the goals, objectives, and desired future conditions (DFCS) described in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Revised Forest Plan.

The Revised Forest Plan may be implemented no sooner than 30 days from the date that the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability of the FEIS appears in the Federal Register.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The monitoring and evaluation program is the quality-control system for a forest plan. This program is described in Chapter 5, "Monitoring and Evaluation", of the Revised Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation receive major emphasis in this revision and will provide us with information on the progress that we achieve in obtaining management goals and objectives. This information will be evaluated and used to update inventory data, to improve current and future mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the Revised Forest Plan. Evaluation of monitoring results is directly linked to the decision maker's ability to respond to changing conditions, emerging trends, public concerns, and new information and technology. No single monitoring item or parameter automatically triggers a change in Revised Forest Plan direction. An interdisciplinary, holistic approach is used to evaluate information and decide what changes are needed.

Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to Revised Forest Plan goals, desired future conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and specific regulatory requirements. Not every goal, objective, standard, and guideline can be monitored. Relevancy to issues, compliance with legal and agency policy, scientific credibility, administrative feasibility, long- and short-term budget considerations, and impact on work force all influence monitoring priorities. High priority monitoring items include those listed in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) biological opinion on the Revised Forest Plan and monitoring effects and assumptions for uneven-aged management.

A range of acceptable approaches have been identified to monitor and evaluate the forestwide status and trends of habitats and populations for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species or for those species selected as management indicator species. One or more of these approaches that can be applied in monitoring a species include: (1) measurement of habitat conditions and trends for species, (2) the use of population occurrence data, (3) the use of population indices to track relative population trends, (4) actual population estimates and demographic information usually reserved for some federally listed species or high risk globally impaired species, and (5) development of research studies to determine species/habitat relationships and species responses to conditions created by land management activities.

Each monitoring question has a monitoring item to answer the question. For each monitoring question, a monitoring task sheet has been developed. These task sheets are used to develop the details, priorities, and budgeting for answering the monitoring questions. The task sheets are not part of my decision but are summarized in the Revised Forest Plan in Appendix F, "Monitoring Summary Tables", for information. Changes to task sheets will not require a Forest Plan amendment.

Public participation is vital as we monitor our progress. We will work with partners and cooperators in developing and carrying out monitoring activities. Activities, findings, and results will be evaluated and reports will be available for the public at least annually. The public may review the results and recommend changes based on monitoring findings, emerging issues or new information.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULES AND BUDGETS

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

MITIGATION

Mitigation measures are an integral part of the forestwide standards and guidelines listed in the Revised Forest Plan in Chapter 2 and of the management area guidelines listed in Chapter 3. These mitigation measures were developed by an interdisciplinary team and contain measures necessary to avoid, minimize, rectify, reduce, eliminate, or compensate for possible adverse environmental effects. Many of the standards and guidelines are incorporated by reference from other documents. These documents include:

- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact for Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1984)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Suppression of the Southern Pine Beetle, Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, April 1987)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, February 1989)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995)

Projects implemented under the authority of the Revised Forest Plan will be conducted in compliance with all laws, regulations, and policies governing activities on national forest land. All management activities will comply with the Louisiana's Best Management Practices. These Best Management Practices are designed primarily to protect water quality as required by Section 208 of the Clean Water Act.

Additional mitigation measures may be developed and implemented at the project level consistent with the measures identified in the Revised Forest Plan.

Use of mitigation measures will be monitored as an integral part of the Revised Forest Plan monitoring program. Results of these mitigation measures will be evaluated; and the mitigation measures, or standards and guidelines may be changed if monitoring results indicate a need.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT SECTION 7 CONSULTATION

This decision is made with the benefit of extensive consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the Revised Forest Plan and EIS. Formal consultation was completed with the final biological opinion of July 6, 1999. The USFWS was provided advanced copies of the Revised Forest Plan, FEIS and the Biological Assessment (BA). The BA assessed effects to federally designated proposed, threatened or endangered species that occur or could occur on the Forest. In a biological opinion, the USFWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination of effects in the BA (See Appendix I of the FEIS). The Forest Service determined that implementation of the Revised Forest Plan "may affect" the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) and "not likely to adversely affect" the Louisiana black bear, the Bald Eagle, the American alligator, and the Louisiana pearlshell mussel. The USFWS biological opinion is that the implementation of the Revised Forest Plan is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the RCW, with a determination of "may affect". The biological opinion included an "incidental take" statement for the RCW in which a "take" is anticipated. The USFWS identified two reasonable and prudent measures to minimize a "take", including:

- Protect all active cavity trees from fire during prescribed burning operations. Protection may involve any number of methods including, but not limited to: (1) raking around or backfiring from the base of the tree, (2) using a "wet" line or foam line around the tree or entire cluster, and (3) mechanically removing vegetation.
- Ensure all active trees lost or any active cavities destroyed by prescribed fire will be replaced within 48 hours by installing the appropriate number of artificial cavities within suitable trees, weather permitting.

Further consultation with USFWS will be part of site-specific evaluations for project-level decisions.

PLAN AMENDMENTS

The Revised Forest Plan is a dynamic instrument that can be changed with appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. Through the life of the Revised Forest Plan, amendments may be needed to incorporate new information, new policy and direction, or changing values and resource conditions. Amendments will keep the Forest Plan current, relevant, and responsive to agency and public concerns. Amendments are needed whenever any of the Revised Forest Plan decisions should be changed due to any of the above conditions. The Revised Forest Plan also can be amended for specific projects if during project design it is determined that the best method of meeting goals and objective conflicts with existing standards and guidelines.

Amendments may be significant or non-significant. The Forest Supervisor may implement non-significant amendments to the Revised Forest Plan after appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. The Regional Forester approves significant amendments.

APPEAL INFORMATION

This decision may be appealed in accordance with the provisions of **36 CFR 217** by filing a written notice of appeal within 90 days from the date of publication of the legal notice. The appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer:

Express Mail:

USDA - Forest Service
Attn: Appeals Office, NFS-3NW
201 14th Street NW
Washington DC 20250

Regular Mail:

USDA - Forest Service
Attn: Appeals Office, NFS-3NW
PO Box 96090
Washington DC 20290-6090

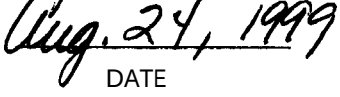
The notice of appeal must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (**36 CFR 217.9**). Requests to stay the approval of this Land and Resource Management Plan shall not be granted (**36 CFR 217.10 (b)**).

The Revised Forest Plan will be implemented 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Forest Plan, the **FEIS**, and the Record of Decision appear in the Federal Register. All new permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands and resources uses must conform to the Revised Forest Plan. Permits, contracts, and other instruments that were in existence before implementation will be reviewed (if needed), subject to valid existing rights. No decisions on site-specific projects are made in this document. Those projects identified in the Revised Forest Plan or **FEIS** as probable activities are only included to indicate approximate scheduling and practice and to estimate effects. Final decisions on site-specific projects will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

I encourage anyone concerned about the Revised Forest Plan or **FEIS** or who would like more information to contact:

Lynn Neff
Forest Supervisor
Kisatchie National Forest
2500 Shreveport Highway
Pineville, Louisiana 71360

ELIZABETH ESTILL



DATE

Regional Forester
Southern Region, USDA Forest Service

PLAN AMENDMENTS

APPEAL INFORMATION