

# Bankhead National Forest Health and Restoration Plan

June 2002-July 2004

**Location:** Alabama

## Background

The USDA Forest Service was seeking ways to engage affected parties in developing a Forest Health and Restoration Initiative for the Bankhead National Forest in Alabama. Controversy and mistrust had characterized public reaction to Forest Service management of the Bankhead in recent years. The Forest Service wanted to reverse this trend and create a more inclusive environment for forest management.

Through its Federal Partnership Program, the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution helped the Forest Service evaluate opportunities for more collaborative forest planning.

The Institute helped develop a collaborative plan and assisted the Forest Service and stakeholders in selecting capable facilitators. The facilitation team began by conducting an assessment of the situation. Then they helped convene and facilitate a multi-stakeholder process.

The group's goal was to reach agreement on the desired conditions for forest communities. They also wanted to put together a 5-year program of priority actions needed to address forest health and restoration issues.

## Highlights/Innovation

- The Forest Service achieved its goal of fostering a positive and productive environment for future management of the Bankhead National Forest. In the words of one stakeholder:

*“Compared with our previous adversarial relationships between residents, loggers, and environmentalists, this program went smooth and was excellent.”*

- This process represents a successful model that can be used in other collaborative efforts on the National Forests of Alabama. Examples might include transportation planning, recreational opportunities, and hydropower re-licensing.



## Results and Accomplishments

- In July 2004, the parties reached agreement on the terms of the Bankhead Forest Health and Restoration Initiative. They continued working to define ongoing support needs such as an active monitoring and adaptive management effort.
- Collaborative efforts like this one can engage, inform, and empower stakeholders to deal with environmental problems before they reach a crisis point. Collaboration fosters productive working relationships among stakeholders. It also creates a sense of ownership and commitment to practical solutions that are less likely to be challenged.
- Every appeal the Forest Service receives costs a minimum of \$5,000 in attorney fees and 10-20 times that much for complex appeals. Legal costs begin at \$50,000 for unresolved appeals. Other important costs are opportunity costs such as lost time for agency personnel who have to work on appeals and litigation instead of attending to on-the-ground activities. Effectively managed conflicts can mean significant direct and indirect savings for stakeholders.

## Credits

### Partners from National Roster of ECR Practitioners

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