
**DECISION NOTICE AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**MUNSON SANDHILL II ANALYSIS AREA
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
COMPARTMENTS 201, 202, 218, AND 226
WAKULLA RANGER DISTRICT
APALACHICOLA NATIONAL FOREST
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

DECISION

Based upon my review of the Munson Sandhill II Environmental Assessment (EA) and supporting documents, I have decided to implement Alternative B, along with its coordination measures which would:

- Clearcut approximately 1,165 acres of off-site Slash pine plantations and restore them to a native longleaf pine wiregrass ecosystem. Longleaf pine would be cut only for access or operational purposes.
- Thin approximately 458 acres of longleaf stands to 50 square foot of basal area to reduce competition between trees, increase radial growth, and tree vigor. Some of this thinning will be in mature longleaf pine stands equal to or greater than 50 square foot basal area.
- Apply the herbicides hexazinone and/or triclopyr to treat hardwood trees and brush for site preparation, pine release and mid-story control on approximately 1,771 acres.
- Where applicable, stands or areas containing excessive hardwood may be designated for public firewood gathering areas when situated along major roads with good access.
- Restore native groundcover species on approximately 975 acres in clearcuts, understocked scrub oak stands, and erosion control areas by supplementing native grasses. The site may be prepared for seeding using mechanical equipment to shear and pile standing trees or logging debris. The piles would be burnt or hauled off to facilitate the seeding operations with a Grasslander® seed drill. The restoration goal would be to facilitate the historical balance of groundcover, midstory, and canopy components of the longleaf forest.
- Prescribed burn approximately 1,615 acres for site preparation, pine release and mid-story control.
- Plant Longleaf pine seedlings on approximately 1,591 acres for reforestation and adequate stocking.
- Release approximately 157 acres of pine plantations from competing hardwood trees and brush with the herbicides hexazinone or triclopyr.

- Decommission and rehabilitate approximately 2 miles of motorcycle trail segments (Sections 12B and 14) and reroute approximately 1 mile of motorcycle trail.
- Stabilize 1-5 acres of active soil erosion along private boundary lines and motorcycle trails.

Connected actions necessary to facilitate the proposed action include maintenance of 7.2 miles of landlines, reconstruction of approximately 13.96 miles of system roads, temporary improvement and use of approximately 4.63 miles of non-system which provide access to pine plantations, and the maintenance of approximately 12.51 miles of system roads used to haul timber products from the analysis area.

If approved, these actions would take place in Compartments 201, 202, 218, and 226 of the Wakulla Ranger District, Apalachicola National Forest in Leon County, Florida within the next 5-10 years.

Table 1: Proposed Action, Alternative B – Estimated Treatment Acres by Stand

Comp	Stand	Treat AC	Treatment	Reforest Under Stocked Oak Stands	Clearcut	Thin	Triclopyr & Hexazinone Treatments	Triclopyr	Hex	Public Firewood	Mechanical Pile or Remove	Seed Native Grass Grasslander	Plant Wiregrass Plugs	Plant Longleaf	Pine Release
0201	4	23	REPL						23					23	
0201	7	25	CC		25				25					25	
0201	9	4	CC		4				4					4	
0201	11	26	CC		26				26					26	
0201	12	10	PLT	10					10					10	
0201	14	17	PLT	17					17					17	
0201	15	40	CC		40				40					40	
0201	16	15	PLT	15					15					15	
0201	17	45	CC		45				45					45	
0201	20	7	CC		7				7					7	
0201	24	25	CC		25				25					25	
0201	25	17	PLT	17					17					10	
0201	26	33	CC		33			33		33	33	33		33	
0201	27	13	THN			13									
0201	29	10	REL						10						10
0201	30	5	PLT	5					5		5	5		5	
0201	32	32	THN			32									
0201	34	27	THN			27									
0201	36	2	THN			2									
0201	37	22	THN			22									
0201	49	8	CC		8				8		8	8		8	
0201	50	6	PLT	6					6		6	6		6	
0201	51	26	CC		26				26		26	26		26	
0201	53	9	CC		9				9		9	9		9	
0201	53	11	REPL						11					11	
0201	54	27	REPL						27					27	
0201	57	11	CC		11				11		11	11		11	
0201	59	24	REL						24						24
0201	86	31	CC		31				31					31	
0201	102	7	REL						7						7
0202	3	9	REL						9						9
0202	3	24	THN			24									
0202	4	29	CC		29				29		29	29		29	
0202	5	5	CC		5				5					5	

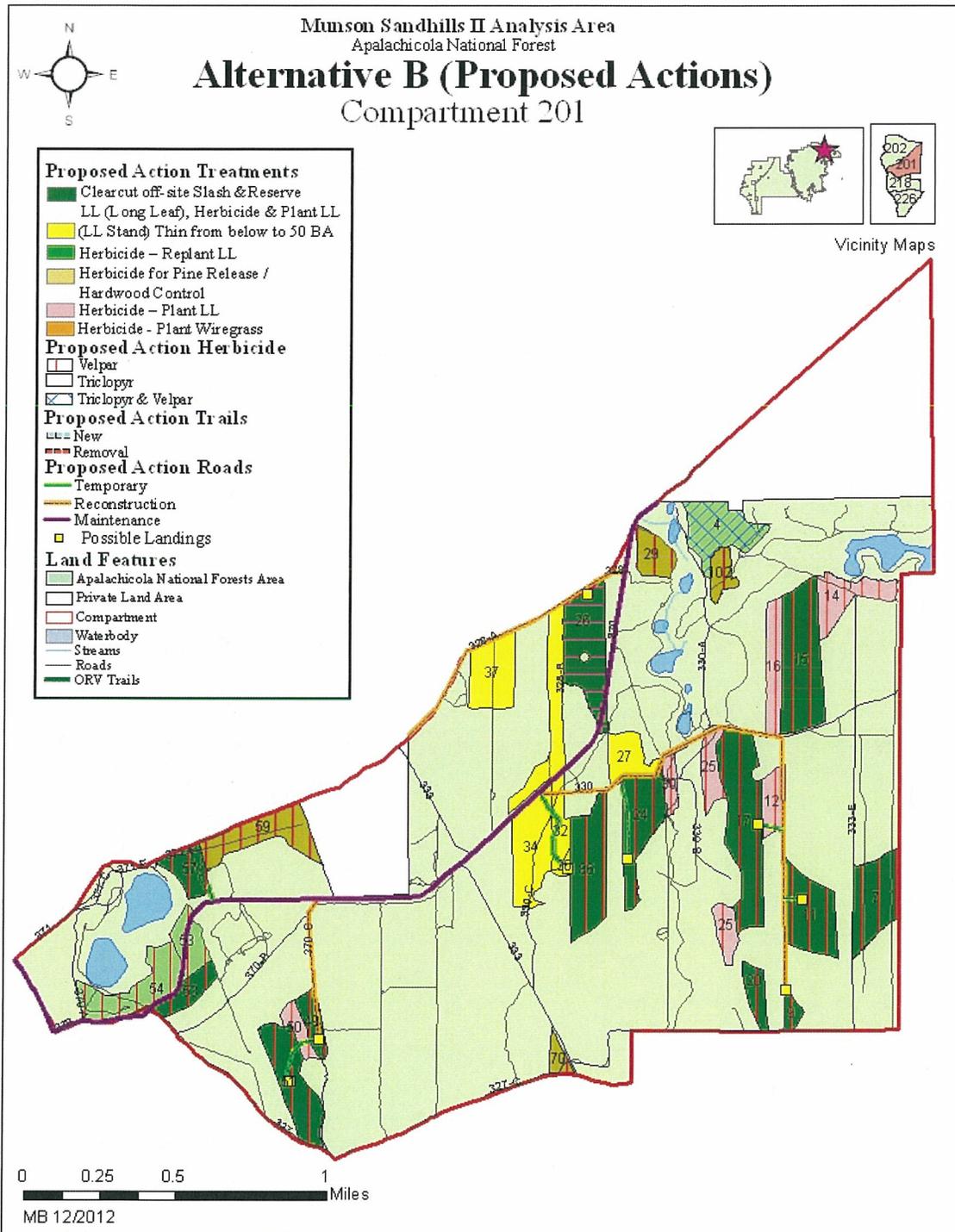


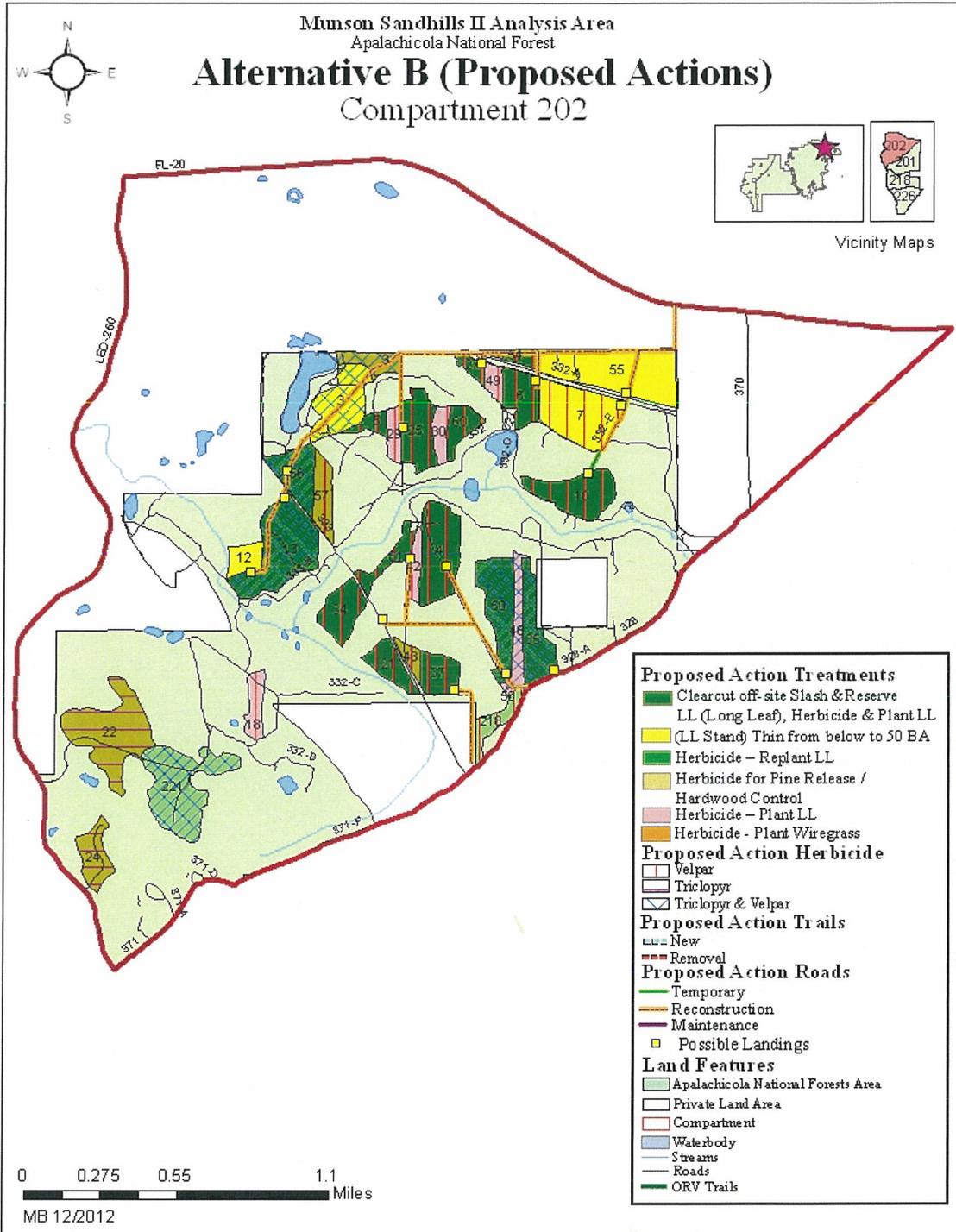
Comp	Stand	Treat AC	Treatment	Reforest Under Stocked Oak Stands	Clearcut	Thin	Triclopyr & Hexazinone Treatments	Triclopyr	Hex	Public Firewood	Mechanical Pile or Remove	Seed Native Grass	Plant Wiregrass Plugs	Plant Longleaf	Pine Release
0202	6	14	CC		14				14		14	14		14	
0202	7	35	THN			35									
0202	10	24	CC		24				24					24	
0202	12	8	THN			8									
0202	13	40	CC		40		40				40	40		40	
0202	18	9	PLT	9					9					9	
0202	21	11	CC		11				11		11	11		11	
0202	22	42	REL					42							42
0202	25	20	CC		20				20					20	
0202	27	5	CC		5				5		5			5	
0202	29	7	PLT	7					7					7	
0202	30	7	PLT	7					7					7	
0202	34	16	CC		16				16		16	16		16	
0202	35	21	CC		21		21			21	21	21		21	
0202	37	12	CC		12			12			12	12		12	
0202	42	7	PLT	7					7		7	7		7	
0202	43	4	REL						4						4
0202	46	13	PLT	13			13						13	13	
0202	49	5	PLT	5					5		5	5		5	
0202	50	26	CC		26		26				26	26		26	
0202	54	6	CC		6				6		6	6		6	
0202	55	48	THN			48									
0202	56	16	CC		16		16				16	16		16	
0202	57	12	REL						12						12
0202	60	9	CC		9				9					9	
0202	61	9	CC		9				9		9	9		9	
0202	218	9	REPL						9					9	
0202	221	41	REPL				41							41	
0218	4	32	CC		32		32				32	32		32	
0218	5	7	PLT	7			7						7	7	
0218	7	17	CC		17				17		17	17		17	
0218	8	15	PLT	15					15		15	15		15	
0218	9	36	CC		36				36		36	36		36	
0218	10	7	PLT	7					7		7	7		7	
0218	12	6	CC		6				6		6	6		6	
0218	13	53	THN			53									
0218	14	12	PLT	12			12							12	
0218	16	10	PLT	10					10		10	10		10	
0218	17	32	CC		32				32		32	32		32	
0218	19	19	CC		19				19		19	19		19	
0218	20	27	PLT	27					27	6	27	27		27	
0218	21	9	CC		9		9							9	
0218	22	13	CC		13				13		13	13		13	
0218	23	10	WIRE						10				10		
0218	24	18	WIRE						18				18		
0218	25	18	CC		18				18					18	
0218	26	2	CC		2				2					2	
0218	28	15	CC		15				15					17	
0218	29	9	CC		9				9		9	9		9	
0218	30	18	CC		18				18		18	18		18	
0218	31	7	CC		7				7		7	7		7	
0218	32	9	PLT	9					9		9	9		9	
0218	33	5	CC		5				5		5	5		5	
0218	34	8	CC		8				8		8	8		8	
0218	36	17	CC		17				17	17				17	
0218	40	13	CC		13				13	13				13	
0218	45	7	CC		7				7		7	7		7	

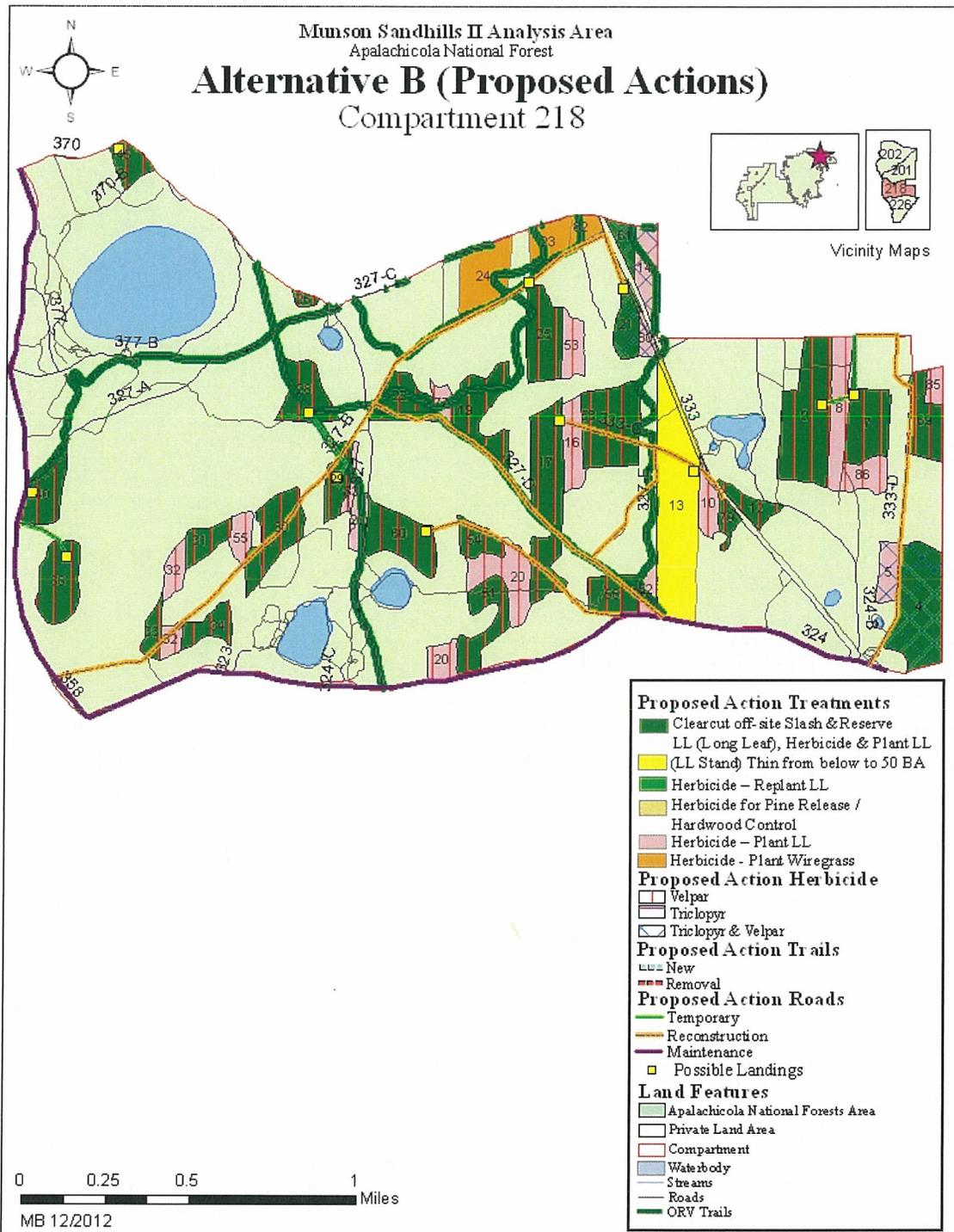


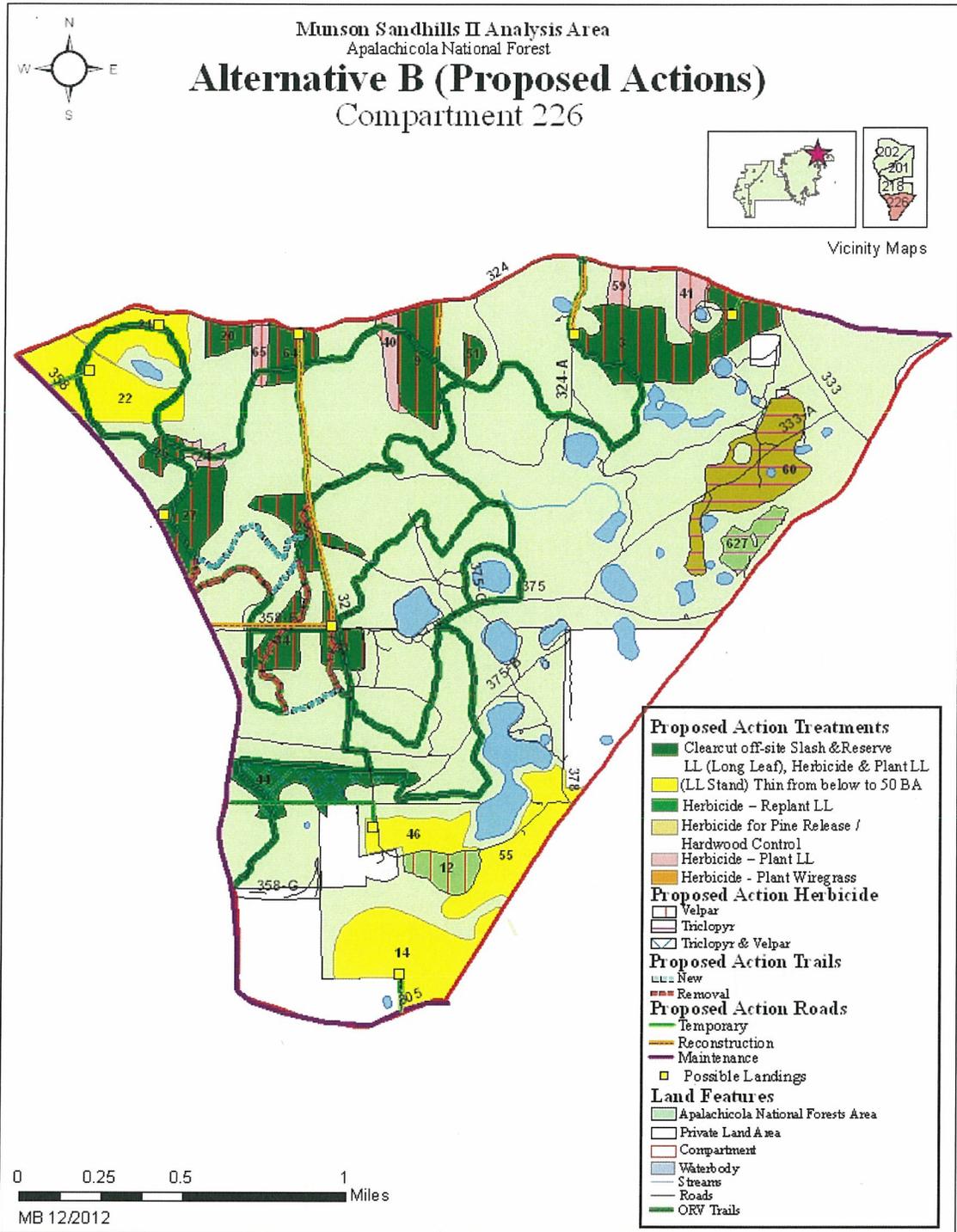
Comp	Stand	Treat AC	Treatment	Reforest Under Stocked Oak Stands	Clearcut	Thin	Triclopyr & Hexazinone Treatments	Triclopyr	Hex	Public Firewood	Mechanical Pile or Remove	Seed Native Grass Grasslander	Plant Wiregrass Plugs	Plant Longleaf	Pine Release
0218	51	14	CC		14				14	14	14	14		14	
0218	52	5	PLT	5					5	5				5	
0218	53	8	PLT	8					8					8	
0218	54	7	CC		7				7		7	7		7	
0218	55	6	PLT	6					6		6	6		6	
0218	56	11	CC		11				11	11				11	
0218	58	26	CC		26				26		26	26		26	
0218	60	19	CC		19				19		19	19		19	
0218	61	5	CC		5		5							5	
0218	69	14	CC		14				14					14	
0218	77	4	PLT	4					4		4	4		4	
0218	79	4	CC		4				4		4	4		4	
0218	80	3	PLT	3			3							3	
0218	82	4	WIRE						4				4		
0218	83	3	PLT	3					3		3	3		3	
0218	85	4	PLT	4					4					4	
0218	86	8	PLT	8					8		8	8		8	
0226	3	64	CC		64				64	64	64	64		64	
0226	9	28	CC		28				28	28	28	28		28	
0226	12	15	REPL						15					15	
0226	14	59	THN			59									
0226	20	8	CC		8				8	8	8	8		8	
0226	21	27	THN			27									
0226	22	48	THN			48									
0226	24	5	PLT	5					5		5	5		5	
0226	26	7	CC		7				7		7	7		7	
0226	27	27	CC		27				27	27	27	27		27	
0226	29	18	CC		18				18		18	18		18	
0226	33	12	CC		12				12		12	12		12	
0226	34	14	CC		14				14		14	14		14	
0226	40	9	PLT	23					9	23	23	23		23	
0226	41	8	PLT	8					8				8	8	
0226	44	32	CC		32		32			32				32	
0226	46	21	THN			21									
0226	51	4	CC		4				4	4				4	
0226	55	39	THN			39									
0226	59	5	PLT	5					5				5	5	
0226	60	49	REL					49							49
0226	64	15	CC		15				15	15	15	15		15	
0226	65	6	PLT	6					6	6	6	6		6	
0226	627	12	REPL					12						12	
				293	1165	458	257	148	1366	327	905	910	65	1591	157

* CC=Clearcut, THN=Thin to 50 BA, PLT=Site Prep and plant, REPL=Site prep and replant, WIRE=plant Wiregrass









COORDINATION MEASURES

Coordination measures were incorporated into the design of the alternatives 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 (USDA, 1999, p. 3.1-3.32), particularly those described below.

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 informal consultation would be reinitiated if the USFWS or the FS determines it is needed.
- When working in potential gopher tortoise habitat, FS personnel will prohibit locating log landings, designating 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. (*USDA 1999, p. 3.29*).
- Purchasers and contractors will be advised of the possible presences of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and will be instructed to avoid harming any wildlife they encounter, including snakes.

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 1999, 3.5).
- **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 1999, 3.6).

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, 2004 Revision.
- **WA-2** A 35-foot Special/Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) will be required in the following areas (USDA 1999, 3.24): Compartment 201 Stands 14, 29, 102 and Compartment 202 stands 10, 12, 13, 21, 34, and 61.

Timber Harvest

- Where possible relict and flattop longleaf and slash pines would not be marked for harvest.
- Logging would only occur during dry periods to reduce rutting and/or compaction.

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 1999, 3.23). Contract specifications for equipment cleaning will be placed in contracts to prevent the introduction of exotic plants.
- **VG-18** – Minimize soil-disturbing site preparation in longleaf and slash pine sites. When disturbance is necessary to achieve the desired future conditions, use methods that displace no more than 10 percent of the soil surface in the treated area. The objective should be to maintain the integrity of the native herbaceous vegetation (especially wiregrass) overtime (USDA 1999, 3.20).
- Follow guidelines for planning and applying herbicides (Veg. Mgmt. FEIS, 1989).

Visual Quality

VG-15 - To enhance visual quality, require that slash, tops, and logging debris be piled on more than 2 feet high within 100 feet of the major travel way. Affected stands include Compartment 201, Stands 27, 29, 34; Compartment 202 stands 24, 26, 32; and Compartment 226 Stands 14, 55, 627

DECISION RATIONALE

The primary purpose of this proposal is to maintain a healthy forest and improve ecosystem functioning by: removing off-site species and replacing them with indigenous longleaf pine; thinning pine plantations and mature pine stands to increase growth rates while removing diseased trees; reducing and controlling overabundant hardwood trees and brush to restore native herbaceous groundcover; releasing young longleaf plantations from hardwoods trees and brush, and also stabilizing soil erosion to maintain soil productivity. Secondary benefits would improve future habitat for proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive (PETS) species, such as the

gopher tortoise, Indigo snake and the Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) through vegetation management.

Based on the existing and desired conditions, it is obvious to me that the off-site slash pine trees need to be replaced with longleaf trees which are adapted to the dry sandhill sites. This will allow these sites to grow into maturity providing future habitat for the RCW. Reforesting the non-stocked oak strips will get pine trees established on these sites which produce pine straw for fine fuel allowing these sites to be prescribed burned. The ability to prescribe burn is essential to long-term restoration goals (future desired condition). Supplementing groundcover grasses by sowing native seed will also help fire spread across the landscape. The thinning of young overstocked pine plantations is a standard practice utilized in forest management to maintain stand health and vigor. Harvesting and site preparation methods proposed to shape the future conditions of these stands have been utilized successfully in the past by the Forest Service and many other land management practitioners.

I selected alternative B because the no-action alternative (A) would not accomplish the goals and objectives established in the forest plan and would not meet the purpose and need for action. I selected alternative B over the mechanical alternative (C) because the herbicides hexazinone and triclopyr have been used frequently with great success in similar ground conditions across this forest. These herbicides work well to control competing vegetation which is the key to restoring longleaf pine to these sites.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Apalachicola National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal through scoping notification, legal notices and posting the draft EA on the National Forests' In Florida Web page for the 30-day notice and comment period. The EA lists agencies and people consulted on page 65.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The significance of environmental impacts must be considered in terms of context and intensity. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human and national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. In the case of a site-specific action, significance usually depends upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Intensity refers to the severity or degree of impact. (40 CFR 1508.27)

CONTEXT

The Munson Sandhill II Analysis area is in the North-East portion of the Wakulla Ranger District. All compartments have common borders with private land and are situated just west of the Tallahassee Airport. The forest has several user groups that pursue dispersed recreation opportunities within this area. There are several environmental groups that look to the forest as

having pristine model longleaf pine ecosystems. There are also research organizations that utilize the National Forest for their studies. These groups operate over the whole forest but may or may not be present where the proposed actions would take place. All of the proposed actions would take place within the next 5 to 7 years.

INTENSITY

The intensity of effects was considered in terms of the following:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial.**
Consideration of the intensity of environmental effects is not biased by beneficial effects of the action.
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.** There will be no significant effects on public health and safety because the proposed actions will utilize known design standards or be applied according to the product labels.
3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.** There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because the impacts of the proposed treatments would be limited to the land within the analysis area. It is unlikely that any effects would be broad enough to affect the landscape.
4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.** The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known credible scientific controversy over the impacts of the proposed action. All of the proposed actions have been done before in similar ground conditions with satisfactory results. (See EA page 24-63)
5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.** The Agency has considerable experience with actions like the one proposed. The analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. (See EA page 24-63)
6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because all of the proposed actions have been utilized several times before.
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. The effect of the proposed actions are limited to the local area and there are no other effects that would be additive to the effects of the proposed action. (See EA page 24-63)
8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites,

highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because all the stands and roads to be treated by a proposed action have been surveyed by our Forest Archeologist (See EA page 54-55) The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because any site discovered will be flagged to be avoided during the proposed operations. Plus all the contracts required to carry out the proposed work would have Archeological protection clauses which would stop the work immediately if a new site is discovered. (See EA pages 19 and 54)

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.** The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because the Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluation determined there will be no impact or only beneficial impacts. (See EA page 33-36, 42, and 44)
10. **Whether the action threatens to violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.** The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the 1999 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (See EA pages 3 and 19).

After considering the effects of the actions analyzed, in terms of context and intensity, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The decision to implement Alternative B, it is consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's forestwide goals and objectives listed on pages 2-3 to 2-7. The project was designed in conformance with the Forest Plan's standards and guidelines for vegetation management, wildlife habitat improvement, heritage resources protection, wildland fire prevention, and road management.

A Biological Assessment was prepared and received US Fish and Wildlife Service concurrence.

A cultural resource survey was completed and concurrence was received by the State Historic Preservation Office.

Clearcutting has been determined to be the optimum cutting method for regeneration of stands 7, 9, 11, 15, 17, 20, 24, 26, 49, 51, 53, 57, and 86 of Compartment 201; stands 4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 21, 25, 27, 34, 35, 37, 50, 54, 56, 60, and 61 of Compartment 202; Stands 4, 7, 9, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 36, 40, 45, 51, 54, 56, 58, 60, 61, 69, and 79 of Compartment 218 and stands 3, 9, 20, 26, 27, 29, 33, 34, 44, 51, and 64 in Compartment 226. The stands to be clearcut are slash pine plantations that are "off-site" and will be converted to longleaf pine. (see EA page 45)



Based on the above Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA, I determined these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Written appeals, including attachments, shall be sent to: National Forests' in Florida, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 325 John Knox Road, Suite F-100, Tallahassee, Florida 32303-4160. Appeals may be faxed to (850) 523-8504. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Friday, closed on federal holidays. Appeals may be mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-florida@fs.fed.us. The legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal within 45 days of the publication date in the *Tallahassee Democrat*. Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition. In the event of multiple appeals of the same decision, the implementation date is controlled by the date of the last appeal disposition.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Gary Hegg @ ghegg.fs.fed.us or by phone (850) 926-3561 extension 6508.

MARCUS A. BEARD

District Ranger

Date

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