

DECISION NOTICE

and

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

09 Ice Storm Salvage Project

U.S.D.A. Forest Service
Ozark-St. Francis National Forests
Big Piney Ranger District
Conway, Johnson, Madison, Newton, Pope,
Searcy & Van Buren Counties, Arkansas

Decision

The 09 Ice Storm Salvage Project Environmental Assessment (EA) documents the analysis of the Proposed Action and a no action alternative. The EA is on file at the Big Piney Ranger District office in Hector, AR.

It is my decision to select the Proposed Action (PA). The PA consists of the following treatments:

- remove downed/damaged timber from no more than 4,000 acres of pine and 10,000 acres of hardwood stands and along all road rights-of-way via salvage timber sales and personal use permits,
- remove some live trees to create log landings and temporary roads incidental to salvage operations, and
- authorize temporary road construction and minor maintenance to haul roads in order to expedite salvage operations.

Reasons for the Decision

Actions contained within the Proposed Action are consistent with regulations under 36 CFR 218. Management activities in the Proposed Action are consistent with the Revised Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as required by NFMA under 16 USC 1604(i), Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1922.41(1), and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12. The selection of the Proposed Action was based on the analysis contained in the Environmental Assessment and on an examination of the record that shows a thorough review of the best available science and other information. I acknowledge that there may be some unknown, but relevant, information that would be useful in designing the project's activities, but I am satisfied that the efforts to discover and address the environmental impacts of this project are adequate and sufficient. Analysis contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Forest Plan and the Forest Plan, both tiered to in the EA, were also considered in making this decision.

The Proposed Action (PA) was selected because:

- 1) I believe the PA provides the best plan of action to reduce the fuel loading and chance of insect

infestations following the ice storm that caused the moderate to severe damage to the trees in the project area.

- 2) The Proposed Action addresses one of the four threats to conservation on National Forests as identified by the Chief of the Forest Service Dale Bosworth (Forest Plan, pg. 1-4 and 1-5). The PA addresses the threat of severe wildland fires by reducing the hazardous forest fuels that contribute to its occurrence and severity.
- 3) All adverse environmental impacts can and will be successfully mitigated.
- 4) The PA contributes to the overall Forest resource management strategy by:
 - Reducing the likelihood of insect infestations and disease outbreaks (Forest Plan, pg. 2-11),
 - Reducing the wildland fire hazard (Forest Plan, pg. 2-26), and
 - Providing sawtimber and pulpwood products to assist in meeting the Forest Plan goal of 731 MMBF per decade (Forest Plan, pg. 2-28).

The Proposed Action was selected over the No Action Alternative because:

- The additional fuel loading caused by the ice storm would not be reduced, thus increasing the chance of catastrophic wildfire spreading into the wildland/urban interface,
- Insect infestations would be more likely to occur, and
- No monetary benefits would be made available to local businesses.

Public Involvement and the Consideration of Issues and Comments

Internal and external scoping involved meetings with interested members of the public as well collaboration with local timber companies and the Arkansas Forestry Commission and is documented in the EA (pages 15 & 16).

The EA was mailed to those people who submitted written comments to the scoping notice or during the public meeting. I received no objections during this 30-day objection period.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I have determined that these actions are not a major Federal Action, individually or cumulatively, and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. An environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):

1. According to the EA (pages 14 - 15) and Biological Evaluation (located in the process file), the actions are not likely to adversely affect any threatened or endangered species or their critical habitat. (See section 1508.27(b)(9) of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations.)
2. The project will not significantly affect unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, wetlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA pages 3 - 15). (See section 1508.27(b)(3) of the CEQ

regulations.)

3. The actions will not affect any sites listed in, or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places nor will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources because a survey has been conducted and necessary boundary adjustments have been made. (See section 1508.27(b)(8) of the CEQ regulations.)
4. As discussed in the EA (pages 3 - 15) there are no significant cumulative effects anticipated. (See section 1508.27(b)(7) of the CEQ regulations.)
5. I do not consider the proposal as "highly controversial" with respect to the nature or extent of effects. (See section 1508.27(b)(4) of the CEQ regulations.)
6. Because the actions contemplated are similar to those that have occurred in other portions of the District, I do not feel they present any highly uncertain effects or involve unique or unknown risks. (See section 1508.27(b)(5) of the CEQ regulations.)
7. There are no adverse effects foreseen on public health or safety and this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. (See section 1508.27(b)(2) of the CEQ regulations.)
8. According to the EA, both the beneficial and adverse effects have been identified. (See section 1508.27(b)(1) of the CEQ regulations.)
9. The actions in this decision will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. (See section 1508.27(b)(6) of the CEQ regulations.)
10. None of the actions threaten to lead to violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. (See section 1508.27(b)(10) of the CEQ regulations.)

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

1. State-approved Best Management Practices (BMP) for water quality will be followed for this project. These BMP's are incorporated into mitigations found in the FEIS for the Forest Plan, incorporated by reference. These BMP's are from the State Water Quality Management Plan. The project will be monitored to ensure BMP's are implemented. If implementing actions on a specific site results in effects significantly higher than anticipated due to unforeseen site factors or events, appropriate corrective measures will be considered and implemented. Management requirements under 36 CFR 219.27 will also be followed.
2. This project is reasonable and feasible and results in applying management practices, with appropriate mitigation measures when indicated, that meet the Forest Plan's overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services.
3. Does provide desired effects on forest health, recreation uses, and wildlife.

I have also determined that the Proposed Action:

1. Is right for the lands being harvested and where other treatments are proposed.
2. Is not selected because of its dollar return or output of timber, although these factors were considered.
3. Is selected after considering the potential effects on remaining trees and adjacent stands.
4. Is practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements, and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration.

Appeal, Administrative Review, and Implementation

One objection was received during the 30-day objection period, and has been responded to by the Forest Supervisor. This decision is not subject to further review pursuant to 36 CFR 218.11(b), and the project may be implemented immediately.

/S/ Gary Knudsen
GARY KNUDSEN
District Ranger

5/14/2009
DATE

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