

DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
HIGH MOUNTAIN PROJECT
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
OZARK ST-FRANCIS NATIONAL FOREST, BIG PINEY RANGER
DISTRICT
POPE & JOHNSON COUNTIES, ARKANSAS

DECISION

Based upon my review of the High Mountain Project Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement The Proposed Action with its site specific design criteria, which includes the following specific activities;

Pine seedtree regeneration harvest on 871 acres

The seed tree timber harvesting method is designed to regenerate aging pine stands, create early serial stage habitat, and encourage a mixed pine and hardwood community. Approximately 10-20 square feet of residual pine and hardwood basal area (10-15 trees per acre) per acre are retained in the overstory after harvesting is complete. Following pine regeneration harvests, competing vegetation would be reduced to create an adequate seedbed for regeneration using an herbicide application (see herbicide use table). Some areas would be regenerated naturally. Within these areas, if an adequate amount of pine regeneration (300-500 trees per acre) is not established within 5 years of harvest, the area would then be replanted with pine seedlings to meet target stocking levels. Regeneration areas outside burning areas are not suitable for natural regeneration efforts because of the absence of periodic prescribed burning to control brush and other competing vegetation. These areas would be planted with shortleaf pine seedlings following site preparation activities to a stocking level of approximately 680 trees per acre. Herbicide release of established regeneration (young trees) is also included in this action (see herbicide use table). Residual seed trees may be removed once adequate regeneration has been established. These areas may be utilized for public firewood sale.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
94	79	100	30
95	80	101	53
96	79	102	28
97*	109	103	11
99	71	104	21

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
105	29	110	7
106	50	111	21
107	41	112	14
108	79	113	13
109	56		

*Note: Area 97 exceeds the maximum acreage limit for a regeneration cut of 80 acres. Final harvested acres will not exceed 80 acres.

Pine shelterwood regeneration harvest on 980 acres

The shelterwood timber harvesting method is designed to regenerate aging pine stands, create early serial stage habitat, and encourage a mixed pine and hardwood community. Approximately 20-35 square feet of residual pine and hardwood basal area per acre are retained in the overstory after harvesting is complete. These areas have a higher hardwood component (more hardwood tress) per acre than the seed tree areas and need the additional residual basal area to help retard the development hardwood competition by reducing sunlight. This will allow for better establishment of planted short leaf pine and promote a mixed (both pine and hardwood) stand after harvest. Following pine regeneration harvests, competing vegetation would be reduced to create an adequate seedbed for regeneration using an herbicide. Areas would be planted with shortleaf pine seedlings following site preparation activities to a stocking level of approximately 680 trees per acre (see herbicide use table page II-12). Herbicide release of established regeneration (young trees) is also included in this action. Residual seed trees may be removed once adequate regeneration has been established. These areas may be utilized for public firewood sale.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
114	29	119	5
115	74	120	43
116	44	121	80
117	26	122	65
118	56	123	51

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
124	31	129	79
125	73	130	42
126	27	131	28
127*	133	132	56
128	32	133	6

***Note: Area 127 exceeds the maximum acreage limit for a regeneration cut of 80 acres. This area will be split into two areas each of which will not exceed 80 acres.**

Pine seedtree removal harvest on 111 acres

These areas have been harvested in the past leaving approximately 20 square feet of residual pine and hardwood basal area (10 – 15 trees) per acre in the overstory after harvesting. Following the original harvest these areas were planted with shortleaf pine seedlings following site preparation activities and have reached a stocking level of approximately 680 trees per acre. Because these areas are stocked the pine seedtree removal harvest method will remove (harvest) the 20 square feet of residual pine and hardwood basal area (10 – 15 trees) per acre left after the regeneration harvest. A release (thinning) of young seedlings from overtop/competing vegetation using hand tools (chainsaws or brush saws) or an herbicide application would also be a part of this action (see herbicide use table page II-12). This will increase the growth and development of the young seedlings. Following the release treatment, 3-7 years, a pre-commercial thinning treatment would be done using the same methods as outlined above.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
215	51	216	60

Area	Acres	Area	Acres

Hardwood shelterwood harvest 822 acres

The shelterwood timber harvesting method is designed to regenerate aging hardwood stands, create early serial stage habitat, and encourage a mixed pine and hardwood community. This harvesting method would remove trees from selected stands in order to create an environment for the development and growth of advanced regeneration. Approximately 20-40 square feet of hardwood basal area per acre (15-30 trees per acre) are retained in the overstory after harvesting is complete. This harvesting method would be used in hardwood species followed by manual or herbicide site preparation (see herbicide use table), prescribed burning, planting (if natural regeneration doesn't develop), and herbicide release (see herbicide use table) of established regeneration (young trees). The minimum stocking level for hardwood species is 250 trees per acre following harvest operations. Residual seed trees may be removed once adequate regeneration has been established. These areas may be utilized for public firewood sale.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
7	40	14	39
8	31	15	40
9	40	16	36
10	40	17	40
11	30	18	40
12	40	19	34
13	40	20	23

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
21	9	28	37
22	32	29	27
23	37	30	18
24	39	31	23
25	32	32	18
26	23		
27	14		

Pine Commercial Thinning 3,326 acres

Stands would be thinned to improve the growth and health of the stands and the development of higher quality trees. Currently the project area is overstocked (too many trees per acre) reducing health and vigor and creating susceptibility to catastrophic fire, insects and disease. Trees selected for removal would be those that were damaged, diseased, suppressed, and poorly formed. Spacing of remaining trees would then serve as the determinant for removal. Applying this treatment would leave a healthier and more vigorous stand of trees.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
134	50	152	46
135	12	153	14
136	32	154	89
137	33	155	13
138	84	156	139
139	51	157	39
140	116	158	11
141	263	159	65
142	35	160	20
143	7	161	11
144	20	162	22
145	59	163	21
146	47	164	86
147	74	165	53
148	34	166	222
150	80	167	34
151	42	168	87

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
169	61	186	42
170	64	187	7
171	19	188	33
172	9	189	9
173	49	190	10
174	205	191	11
175	234	193	43
176	78	194	7
177	5	195	5
178	94	196	62
179	39	197	49
180	24	198	8
181	62	199	19
182	13	200	19
183	10	201	8
184	14		
185	3		

Hardwood commercial thinning on 1,911 acres

These areas would be commercially thinned to improve the growth and health of the stands and the development of higher quality trees. Currently these areas are overstocked (too many trees per acre) reducing health and vigor and creating susceptibility to catastrophic fire, insects and disease. Trees selected for removal (harvest) would be those that were damaged, diseased, suppressed, and poorly formed. Spacing of remaining trees would then serve as the determinant for removal. Applying this treatment would leave a healthier and more vigorous stand of trees.

These areas may be utilized for public firewood sale.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres	Area	Acres	Area	Acres
33	15	46	34	59	104	73	14
34	34	47	75	61	223	74	6
35	13	48	7	62	18	75	39
36	21	49	33	63	44	76	25
37	32	50	62	64	9	77	10
38	10	51	11	65	31	78	47
39	97	52	65	66	4	79	22
40	31	53	55	67	19	80	39
41	11	54	62	68	28	81	69
42	20	55	24	69	12	82	34
43	87	56	45	70	24		
44	48	57	73	71	19		
45	57	58	39	72	10		

Existing woodland management on 224 acres

Within the project area there are approximately 224 acres of existing woodlands that have previously been thinned by various methods to promote the development of native grasses and forbs. Currently the desired future conditions are not being reached because competition from woody species is hampering the growth and development of native grasses and forbs. In order to reach the desired condition, herbicides would be used to control woody species in these areas (see herbicide use table). The goal is to have mature open woodland dominated by native grasses and forbs in the understory. Additional spot treatments would be needed to reach the desired future condition in some areas. In conjunction with prescribed burning, treatments would increase overall habitat diversity.

Woodland management on 407 acres

Within the project area there are approximately 407 acres of stands would be thinned commercially, manually (chainsaw), and with herbicide to permit sunlight to reach the forest floor to promote the development of native grasses and forbs. Thinning would reduce tree cover to 40-80 feet of basal area per acre, based on site specific conditions. In order to reach the desired condition, herbicides would be used to control woody species in these areas. This would be done manually (chainsaws or brush saws only) or by a basal spray, stem injection, or cut surface herbicide treatment on brush more than 6 feet in height and using herbicide foliar spray treatment on brush less than 6 feet to control competition. The goal is to have mature open woodland dominated by native grasses and forbs in the understory. In conjunction with prescribed burning, treatments would increase overall habitat diversity.

Hardwood thinning for firewood on 99 acres

These areas are typically on poor soils that produce smaller diameter trees and low volumes making them uneconomical to thin commercially, but still have too many trees per acre for best growing conditions. To accomplish the need for thinning in these areas and meet the demand of

providing firewood to the public they would be thinned to a residual basal area of 50-60 square feet or basal area per acre based on the average stand diameter. This would improve the growth and health of these areas and reduce their susceptibility to catastrophic fire, insects and disease. Trees selected for removal (harvest) would be those that were damaged, diseased, suppressed, and poorly formed. Spacing of remaining trees would then serve as the determinant for removal. Applying this treatment would leave a healthier and more vigorous stand of trees.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
1	27	2	47

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
3	25		

Pine and hardwood shelterwood preparation cutting on 285 acres.

These areas have been identified as future (within 10-15 years) regeneration areas. They are currently overstocked (too many trees per acre) for best growth. Because they are overstocked the canopy is closed which retards the development of advanced regeneration (young trees). The shelterwood preparation cut method would reduce the number of trees per acre allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor. This will increase the overall health and vigor of the remaining trees and promote the development of advance hardwood and pine regeneration. An herbicide application in the form of foliar spray, stem injection, basal spray and/or chainsaw fell and cut surface spray would also be used to aid in controlling understory species and promoting the establishment, development, and growth of advanced regeneration.

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
4	43	5	83

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
6	41	98	118

Seedling release and pre-commercial thinning on 521 acres

These areas have been harvested in the past and have established seedlings (young trees) that are crowded (too many trees per acre) reducing tree health and vigor. Seedlings would be released (thinned) from overtop/competing vegetation using hand tools (chainsaws or brush saws) or a herbicide application in the form of foliar spray, stem injection, basal spray, and/or chainsaw fell and cut surface spray (see herbicide use table for details). Following the release treatment, 3-7 years, a pre-commercial thinning treatment would be done using the same methods as outlined above. The areas that this treatment will be applied to are as follows:

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
202	50	206	33
203	20	207	35
204	25	208	37
205	35	209	40

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
210	42	214	44
211	30		
212	64		
213	66		

Pre-commercial thinning on 684 acres

These areas consist of trees that are approximately 30-70 years old that are crowded (too many trees per acre) reducing tree health and vigor. Trees would be released (thinned) from overtop/competing vegetation using hand tools (chainsaws or brush saws). Trees selected to be

cut would be those that were damaged, diseased, suppressed, and poorly formed. Spacing of remaining trees would then serve as the determinant for removal. Applying this treatment would leave a healthier and more vigorous stand of trees. These areas may be utilized for public firewood sale. The areas that this treatment will be applied to are as follows:

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
83	8	86	15
84	37	87	28
85	25	88	44

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
89	42	92	225
90	72	93	29
91	66	228	93

Timber stand improvement thinning with herbicides on 578 acres

These areas consist of trees that are approximately 30-70 years old that are crowded (too many trees per acre) reducing tree health and vigor. Trees would be released (thinned) from overtop/competing vegetation using hand tools (chainsaws or brush saws) or a herbicide application in the form of foliar spray, stem injection, basal spray, and/or chainsaw fell and cut surface spray. Trees selected to be cut/treated would be those that were damaged, diseased, suppressed, and poorly formed. Spacing of remaining trees would then serve as the determinant for removal. Applying this treatment would leave a healthier and more vigorous stand of trees. These areas may be utilized for public firewood sale. The areas that this treatment will be applied to are as follows:

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
217	150	220	10
218	17	221	29
219	15	222	124

Area	Acres	Area	Acres
223	51	226	20
224	52	227	13
225	97		

Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS) control on approximately 500 acres (Annually)

An herbicide treatment (see herbicide use table) would be used to control identified non-native invasive species (NNIS) and roadside woody vegetation on up to 500 acres annually. These non-indigenous plant species degrade the diversity of wildlife habitat in forest openings, primarily along roads, but will be treated elsewhere where they occur. Control of existing infestations will aid the reestablishment of native vegetation.

The table below identifies the NNIS believed to occur in the project area and the herbicides that would be used to control them.

NNIS/ Herbicide treatment Table

Non-Native Invasive Species Treated	Herbicide Treatment
Privet - <i>ligustrum spp.</i>	Glyphosate or Metsulfuron methyl
Paulownia- <i>paulownia tomentosa</i>	Imazapyr (large stems) Triclopyr (sprouts)
Tree of Heaven- <i>Ailanthus altissima</i>	Imazapyr (large stems) Triclopyr (sprouts)
Exotic Lespedezas- <i>cuneata</i> and <i>bicolor</i>	Metsulfuron methyl or Triclopyr
Japanese Honeysuckle- <i>Lonicera japonica</i>	Triclopyr
Nonnative Rose- <i>Rosa multiflora</i>	Imazapyr or Metsulfuron methyl
Mimosa- <i>Albizia julibrissin</i>	Imazapyr (large stems) Triclopyr (sprouts)
Japanese stiltgrass- <i>Microstegium vimineum</i>	Glyphosate

Recommended controls are those provided by:

Invasive Plant Responses to Silvicultural Practices in the South - Evans, Moorhead, Barger and Douce and *Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forests* – James H. Miller

As new NNIS are found, they would be treated using appropriate methods, following application rates on herbicide labels. Application rates will be in accordance with manufacture’s label.

Management of wildlife openings (total of 465 acres) for high quality forage by new construction of approximately 75 acres of openings, enlarge existing openings on 330 acres, management of 11 acres of existing openings, and dropping/reforesting 49 acres of existing openings – New construction and enlargement of openings are proposed in some areas where the slope of the land will allow for the creation and management of openings. New construction would include short sections of roads for access as part of this proposal and all roads providing access to openings would be closed with gates following management. The opening size would range from approximately 2 to 10 acres depending on the terrain. For the opening construction and enlargement all trees would be harvested and the area prepared for planting of grasses and forbes using a dozer or other heavy mechanical equipment to remove the stumps and clear the debris from harvested trees. The openings would further be prepared for planting of warm and /or cool season native and non-invasive non-native species that provide good forage and cover for wildlife by mechanical equipment. Management of these openings would be accomplished by mowing, haying, liming, seeding, fertilizing, prescribed burning, and /or the use of herbicides to control invasive, woody or encroaching species of vegetation. The 49 acres of openings to be dropped are located in poor rocky soils or in areas where it is not economically feasible to continue maintaining them. These openings would receive an herbicide treatment for any NNIS, if needed, then would be planted with a hardwood species similar to what is existing around the area of the opening.

Construction/reconstruction of 25 wildlife ponds

The construction/reconstruction of wildlife ponds (< ½ acres) would be implemented in order to improve wildlife habitat in the vicinity. These ponds provide permanent water sources to allow for a more even dispersal of wildlife throughout the project area. Pond locations would be identified during implementation when test pits can be dug to determine suitable sites.

Native cane restoration on 323 acres

Areas of native cane were once more prevalent along Indian creek and its tributaries. Due to agricultural clearing and fire suppression, populations of native cane have been reduced in this area. Commercial/non-commercial thinning of overstory and understory trees within the native canes' range would be done to restore and promote the expansion of existing communities. In order to reach the desired condition, herbicides would be used to control woody species in these areas. This would be done manually (chainsaws or brush saws only) or by a basal spray, stem injection, or cut surface herbicide treatment on brush more than 6 feet in height and using herbicide foliar spray treatment on brush less than 6 feet to control competition. Cane would also be planted in strategic locations to promote the further expansion of this community.

Placement of large woody debris in streams

To improve overall stream habitat up to 10 larger trees, typically 12 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH) and greater per mile would be felled into streams within the project area. These streams include perennial, intermittent and larger ephemeral streams.

Two onetime site preparation prescribed burns 1,657 acres

The two site preparation burns would encompass several regeneration areas and additional area to take advantage of existing open roads and trails to utilize as control lines minimizing the need to construct control line with heavy equipment. The regeneration areas would be burned after timber harvest is complete to reduce the amount of fuel and competing vegetation in advance of planting so the seedling trees would have a better opportunity to survive and grow. Prescribed burn control lines may be established along the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) adjacent to private property where landowners do not want the use of fire on their property. As a result, approximately 2 miles of control line construction would be done to accomplish this goal.

Prescribed burning as needed on 751 acres

Prescribed burning is proposed on 224 acres of existing woodland, 407 acres of proposed woodland, and 120 acres to improve visuals near Long Pool Campground. The project area is a fire adapted ecosystem in which fire has been absent for many years creating an overall unnatural condition. The use/reintroduction of fire into this system would assist in restoring the area to its desired future condition. Prescribed burn control lines may be established along the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) adjacent to private property where landowners do not want the use of fire on their property. As a result, approximately 6 miles of control line construction and 3 miles of control line maintenance would be done to accomplish this goal. In addition, mechanical treatments would be used in various locations (areas of heavy fuels, WUI areas, hard to access areas, etc.) to facilitate burning operations. After burns are completed, these control lines are water barred and may be seeded with native grasses and forbs where needed to restore vegetative cover. In order to minimize control line construction, some burn blocks extend to natural or existing man-made fuel breaks, such as streams or roads.

Prescribed burning would be done on National Forest system lands, during dormant or growing season.

Dormant season burning- takes place in fall and winter months, (generally Oct. 1 – April 30) and involves the application of controlled, low to moderate intensity fire to reduce accumulated fuels, stimulate growth of native vegetation, and improve wildlife habitat. Some duff is retained for soil protection. Vegetation 1 ¼ inches or less in diameter would be targeted for reduction to

create an open understory, stimulating growth of native grasses and forbs, and increasing forage for browsing animals.

Growing season burning- takes place in spring and summer months (generally May 1 – Sept. 30) and involves application of controlled, low to moderate intensity fire to control competing vegetation, prepare sites for seeding, and perpetuate fire dependent species. These burns are implemented during the time between leaf emergence and leaf fall. Vegetation 3 inches and less in diameter would be targeted. This will result in less competition for seedlings and other fire dependent species, while creating an open understory. Other added benefits would include reducing accumulated fuels, stimulate growth of native vegetation, and improve wildlife habitat.

Minerals

Public need would be met by allowing surface rock collection (over no more than one percent of the total project area) in commercially harvested timber units in the project area where Biological Evaluations, Heritage surveys and other permit requirements have been completed.

There are currently no proposed gas wells within this project area, although exploration activity has increased elsewhere on the Forest. Any future proposals will receive site-specific analysis and decisions in separate documents.

Improvement of the Moccasin Gap Trail system- Construction and designation of 1.5 miles of new trail, realign 1.7 miles of poorly located trail and decommissioning 3.3 miles of existing trail

This would expand multi-use recreation opportunities and work toward meeting the recreational needs of our forest users. New trail construction and realignment would make the trail system more sustainable by locating the trails in areas where they would require less maintenance and provide better connectivity. The decommissioning of 3.3 miles of existing trails would be to close and stabilize soil movement from poorly located trails which are not maintainable. The result would be the trail system would be safer and soil erosion would be measurably reduced.

Construct 2.5 miles of hiking trail looping to the south from Long Pool Campground

Construction /designation of a short hiking trail system near Long Pool would provide both day and overnight users with the opportunity to hike on designated hiking trails from this recreation area. This would provide greater dispersed recreation opportunities for forest visitors and campers at Long Pool Recreation area.

Construction and installation of emergency closure gate(s) and a turnaround area along the entrance road into Long Pool recreation area.

These gates would provide a way to close off the recreation area during any kind of emergency incident such as a flood event or land slide which could potentially endanger the public. Public safety would be increased by providing a way to keep people out of the Recreation area during an emergency incident.

Construction of 2 parking areas and 1.5 miles of OHV/multiuse trail to access The Buzzards Roost SIA

Currently the public is accessing this SIA via an existing road that crosses two pieces of private property for which no Rights of Ways have been obtained. Efforts are underway to obtain these Rights of Ways, but if these efforts are unsuccessful, the above proposal would address the

access issue by closing/gating the current access road being used and constructing a trail around the private land to access the SIA. The trail would stop short of the SIA boundary and access would be by foot traffic only from that point.

Reconstruction of 18 miles, maintenance of 52 miles, and maintenance and closure of 24 miles of existing roads

System roads would be constructed or reconstructed to facilitate access and hauling of timber from stands proposed for commercial harvest. Work includes, but is not limited to, widening of roads, improving alignment, providing natural turnouts, and improving sight distance that improve the standard to which the road was originally constructed. There are existing roads that would require road maintenance prior to timber hauling. This maintenance includes slide and slump repair, surface blading, spot surfacing with gravel, maintenance of drainage structures, ditch cleaning, and the clearing the roadside of vegetation. The Travel Analysis Report in the process file contains specific information about which roads will have activities on them.

Decommission 24 miles and closure of 14 miles of existing roads, as recommended by Travel Analysis Process (TAP) Report

The decommissioning of existing roads no longer needed for the transportation system in this area would occur. Methods of decommissioning range from blocking the road entrance to full obliteration, and may include re-vegetation, water-barring, fill and culvert removal, establishing drain-ways, removing unstable road shoulders, and restoring natural slopes. The project area contains many open roads that are currently used to access the area. Some of these roads are used by the public but are creating problems due to soil loss and erosion. Other roads being used in the area also create an unfavorable situation for wildlife through unnecessary disturbance. Signs, gates, and/or earthen berms would be used to seasonally and/or permanently close some existing roads to resolve a number of these problems. For road specific information the Travel Analysis Process table is attached as Appendix F the whole Travel Analysis Process Report is contained in the process file at the Jasper office.

Herbicide Use Table

The following table shows number of acres, herbicides used, and method of application for the treatments proposed in the PA

Treatment	Glyphosate	Metsulfuron methyl	Triclopyr (ester)	Triclopyr (amine)	Imazapyr	Triclopyr & Fluroxypyr	Acres
Wildlife opening Management	Foliar	Foliar		Foliar		Foliar	465
Woodland Management	Cut surface		Basal Spray	Foliar &/or stem injection	Stem Injection		631*
NNIS Control	Foliar	Foliar		Foliar &/or stem injection	Stem Injection		500 annually
Pine Seedtree, Shelterwood, and Seedtree Removal	Cut surface			Foliar &/or cut surface	Foliar &/or Stem Injection		1,962**
Hardwood Shelterwood	Cut surface			Foliar &/or cut surface	Foliar &/or Stem Injection		822
Timber Stand Improvement and Release and pre-commercial Thinning			Basal Spray	Foliar &/or cut surface	Foliar &/or Stem Injection		1,099***
Cane Restoration	Cut surface			Foliar &/or cut surface	Stem Injection		323
Pine and Hardwood Shelterwood Prep.	Cut surface			Foliar &/or cut surface	Foliar &/or Stem Injection		285
Total							6,087

* - Includes 224 acres of existing woodlands and 407 acres of proposed woodland.

** - Includes 980 acres of pine shelterwood, 111 acres of pine seedtree removal, and 871 of pine seedtree.

*** - Includes 578 acres of timber stand improvement and 521 acres of release and pre-commercial thinning.

Notes: Tank mixes and adjuvants (such as Cide-Kick) may be added to the herbicide to improve effectiveness and control of target species. All herbicides will be applied at rates and use only application methods specified on the label. Additional spot treatments would be needed to reach the desired future condition in some areas.

SITE SPECIFIC DESIGN CRITERIA

The following areas have been identified by a Landscape Architect as needing site specific project designs to minimize the recreational and scenic impacts created from the proposed action’s vegetative treatments. Each of the areas listed, with one exception (Area 216), are within management areas where the RLRMP goals are to change, promote or enhance the landscape character/setting within that management area. The measures are designed to eliminate obtrusive edges, shapes, patterns and blend the alterations to repeat natural form using line and textures of the natural landscape. The project designs below are site specific for the following areas:

Areas 21, 22, 25, 63, 181, 182 & 210

– Various Silviculture Treatments – All silviculture treatments in Sections 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33 are included in the view-shed having its point of origin at the Rotary Ann overlook on Highway 7 in Pope County. Planned silviculture treatments include Hardwood Thinning, Pine Thinning, some Hardwood Shelterwood and Release & PCT. All treatments in this viewshed should strive to retain a cohesive canopy due to the areas scenic sensitivity with the exception of Areas 21, 22, 25, 63, 181, 182 & 210 located within Sections 21, 28 & 33. In an effort to blend planned treatments with already existing conditions due to recent wind storm damage and in order to repeat natural form using line and textures of the natural landscape, it is recommended that these specific areas be treated in a more sensitive manner.



Figure 1 for site specific project designs - Rotary Ann Overlook Viewshed – Plan View

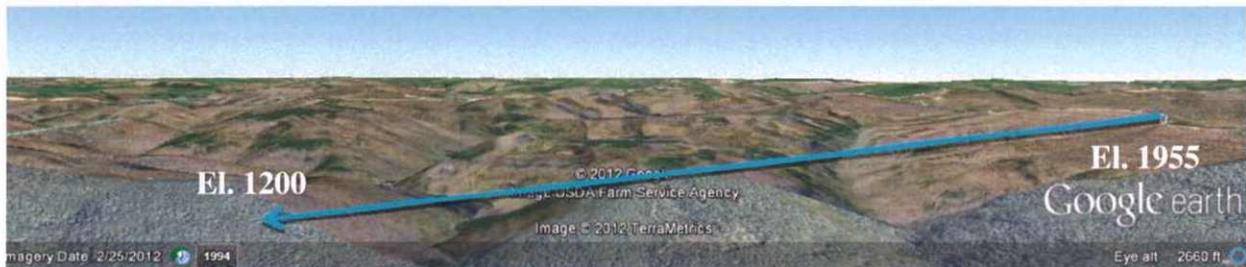


Figure 2 for site specific project designs– Rotary Ann Overlook Viewshed – Vertical Section



Figure 3– Rotary Ann Overlook Viewshed – Looking West into High Mountain Project

- **Area 21, 22 & 25** located on the left side in photo above (highlighted in light green) – Hardwood Shelterwood –it is recommended that the treatment NOT break the canopy.
- **Area 63** bottom right stand in photo above (highlighted in white) – Hardwood Thinning – In an effort to mimic the already existing pattern of open canopy left in the wake of tornado activity top stand in photo above (highlighted in blue) and thus blending the damaged area into a planned forest management objective and lessening the impact of the damage to the viewshed, it is recommended that the typical basal requirements per acre be reduced to match the ratio of canopy to open area already existing in the northeast part of Section 32. It is also recommended that the previously proposed treatment perimeter be shifted to flow visually from the ridge in Section 32 to the east-facing slope of Section 28.
- **Area 181 & 182** – Pine Shelterwood – In an effort to mimic the already existing pattern of open canopy left in the wake of tornado activity and thus blending the damaged area into a planned forest management objective and lessening the impact of the damage to the viewshed, it is recommended that the typical basal requirements per acre be reduced to match the ratio of canopy to open area already existing in the northeast part of Section 32.
- **Area 210** – Release & PCT – It is recommended that the edges of this area blend a 50 ft perimeter into the surrounding area requiring Hardwood/Pine Thinning and that the ratio of open area be similar.

Area 92 – PCT – Leave canopy intact directly west of Rotary Ann Overlook Area and pull the eastern perimeter of area away from the edge of the private property to provide a buffer.

Area 89 – PCT - Pull the northern perimeter of area away from the edge of the private property to provide a buffer.

Area 91 – PCT – Pull the northern perimeter of area away from Highway 7 and private property to the east in order to provide an open view down through to Still Hollow.

Area 90 – PCT – Provide a gradual transition from Freeman Springs Cemetery into the treatment area.

Area 179 – Pine Thinning – Continue treatment up to meet west side of Highway 7.

Area 156 & 149 – Pine Thinning – Preserve the stand of small pines near Highway 7. Treatment on the west side of the highway this should consist of graduated thinning from no treatment within 100 ft of the highway to partial thinning for an additional 200 ft then to typical Pine Thinning. Provide slash disposal up to 50 feet on either side of any trail. The typical Pine Thinning would open up some nice views to the north of the Mocassin Gap Campground.

Areas 143 & 97 – It is recommended that the south east perimeter of the Pine Seedtree treatment Area 97 be pulled back 300 feet off the Overhead Transmission Corridor in order to create a buffer between this visually distracting corridor and the Scenic Class 1 Byway. A 50 foot strip of moderate thinning should be adjacent to and just west of the corridor then a 200 foot buffer of undisturbed forest. Another 50 foot strip of moderate thinning would then transition into the Pine Seedtree area. The overhead transmission line as well as the imposing corridor already disturb the natural character of the Scenic Byway and special care should be taken to avoid adding to the distraction.

Area 96 & 7 – Pine Seedtree – Provide slash treatment as buffer 50 feet either side of Maupin Flat Rd (also known as Treat Rd).

Area 117 – Slash disposal and understory removal for 50 feet into area along Maupin Flats road.

Area 99 – Pine Seedtree – Provide 50 foot Pine Thinning as a buffer west side of road.

Areas 128 & 130 – Should be designated as Pine Shelterwood w/ Seedtree Removal.

Areas 76 & 78 – Release & PCT – Provide 150 foot slash treatment buffer preserving flowering trees on west edge of Coleman Cemetery.

Area 216 – Proposed for Chemical TSI treatment. A section of hiking trail is proposed to go through a portion of this area. For a tree length on either side of the hiking trail, only treat mid and understory trees leaving the larger diameter trees.

DECISION RATIONALE

The Proposed Action with its site specific design criteria was selected because it best addressed the purpose and need in a balanced, cost effective way providing for a high level of resource outputs that can be maintained in perpetuity without harming land productivity. It was selected over Alternative 1 (no action) because Alternative 1 would not address the needs of the area nor move the area towards achieving the desired future conditions outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The No Action Alternative is a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Proposed Action was chosen over Alternative 2 (No Herbicide Use), because it is expected to provide better site conditions for the establishment of regeneration and provide optimum freedom from competition for seedlings. Past experience has shown that manual release usually results in profuse re-sprouting, thus requiring additional treatments and increased costs. The use of herbicides is critical to controlling the population and spread of non-native invasive species. Manual control measures and periodic prescribed burning are not effective management treatments for the control of non-native invasive species present within the project area.

My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information (peer reviewed science), a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Analysis shows this project:

1. Provides for healthy forests by thinning (EA, pg. II-3 – II-6).
2. Provides for early successional habitat (EA, pg. II- - II-3).
3. Begins to balance age classes (EA, pg. I-1).
4. Reduces amount of burnable fuels and increases forage production (EA, pg. II-7, II-9).
5. Provides enhanced wildlife habitat through openings and ponds (EA, pg. II-8).
6. Closes roads not needed for management in the near future (EA, pg. II-11).
7. Provides commodities (EA, pg. I-8).
8. Provides for control of invasive species (EA, pg. II-7, 8).
9. Attempts to address unmanaged recreation (EA, pg. II-10)

An Economics analysis was completed for this project and was incorporated into the EA. A summary of the analysis is attached to the EA as Appendix D.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the proposed action the EA considered two other alternatives. A comparison of the proposed action to the two other alternatives considered can be found on pages II-13 through II-15 in the EA. The following is a summary of the two alternatives considered.

Alternative 1(No Action)

The No Action Alternative is a requirement of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). None of the activities in the proposed action would be implemented. Other activities allowed under previous decisions would continue to be implemented.

Alternative 2 (No Herbicide Use)

Herbicide use would be excluded with this alternative. All other activities would be approved and the treatments which would have included the use of herbicide would be implemented using manual methods.

The High Mountain Project EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Ozark St-Francis National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions on June 1st, 2012 and updated periodically during the analysis. Initial scoping letters invited people to review and comment on the proposal through email, US Postal Mail, hand delivered comments, phone calls, or personal face to face. On June 1st, 2012 a legal notice was published in Russellville, Arkansas' *Courier*, The Big Piney Ranger District's paper of record, 177 letters were mailed to neighboring landowners, Native American Tribes, and other interested parties of those 6 were returned as undeliverable. Three interested parties and two Native American tribes responded to the initial scoping effort.

The pre-decisional EA was posted on the Ozark St-Francis National Forest website on September 12th, 2012. A legal notice to receive comments was published in Russellville's *Courier* newspaper on the same date. Two cover letters were emailed to interested parties who responded to the initial scoping effort. Two copies of the pre-decisional EA were mailed to interested parties. Two commenters submitted comments during this 30 day period.

The comments received were responded to by members of the ID Team and are incorporated into the EA as Appendix G.

The EA also lists other agencies and people consulted in Chapter IV.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The actions are consistent with the intent of the management goals, objectives, and standards in the 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ozark St-Francis National Forest. The project was designed in conformance with the 2005 RLRMP and incorporates appropriate guidelines and mitigation measures. The project is feasible and reasonable, and results in applying management practices that are consistent with the 2005 RLRMP direction of protecting the environment while maintaining natural communities and minimizing effects of non-native invasive species. This decision supports goals and objectives from the 2005 RLRMP as follows;

- 1) Restore and maintain at least 22,000 acres of oak woodland over the first decade, with a long-term objective of 110,000 acres (RLRMP page 2.10)
- 2) Across all community types, maintain a range of 3.8 to 6.8 [percent of the total forest and woodland acreage in regeneration forest conditions (0-10 years old). (RLRMP page 2.10)

- 3) Across all community types, annually burn an average of 120,000 acres under prescribed burn conditions. Burn approximately one-third of this acreage within the growing season (April 1 through October 15) (RLRMP page 2.11)
- 4) Reduce the risk of oak and pine mortality events by thinning and regenerating at least 150,000 acres within the first decade (RLRMP page 2.12)
- 5) Treat at least 200 acres per year for reduction or elimination of non-native, invasive species (RLRMP page 2.12)
- 6) Improve and maintain bobwhite quail habitat on 5,000 acres per year for the first decade (RLRMP page 2.13)
- 7) Improve and maintain habitat for whitetail deer on 10,000 acres per year for the first decade (RLRMP page 2.13)
- 8) Improve and maintain habitat for eastern wild turkey on 10,000 acres per year for the first decade (RLRMP page 2.13)
- 9) Improve and maintain habitat for black bear on 8,000 acres per year for the first decade (RLRMP page 2.13)
- 10) Maintain or restore Large Woody Debris (LWD) levels in perennial streams/ivers at 75 to 200 pieces per mile for all LWD larger than 3.3 feet long and 3.9 inches in diameter in the first decade
- 11) Maintain or restore LWD levels in perennial streams/ivers at 8 to 20 pieces /mile for all LWD larger than 16.4 feet long and 19.7 inches in diameter in the first decade. (RLRMP page 2.16)
- 12) In conjunction with designing low-maintenance, standard roads develop a system of motorized trails that address the needs of OHV enthusiasts (RLRMP page 2.19).
- 13) Evaluate historic sites for appropriate management. Develop site management plans for noteworthy heritage resources wherever they occur. (RLRMP page 2.21)
- 14) Decommission roads and trails unnecessary for conversion to either the road or trail system through the roads analysis process (RAP) (RLRMP page 2.24)
- 15) Identify by the first decade all system roads that should be obliterated (RLRMP page 2.24)
- 16) Within 15 years, restore 15 to 20 percent of all ecological communities into Fire Regime Condition Class 1 (RLRMP page 2.26)
- 17) Annually complete 50,000 to 100,000 acres of hazardous fuel reduction (RLRMP pg 2.26)
- 18) Provide 731 MMBF (146MCF) per decade of saw timber and pulpwood (RLRMP pg 2.28)
- 19) In MA3E (High Quality Forest Products) and appropriate portions of other MAs, apply appropriate silviculture prescriptions to provide the following forest products: 18” to 20” saw-timber with grade 1 or 2 butt logs and /or yellow pine 18’ saw-timber. (RLRMP page 2.28)
- 20) Treat up to 300 acres per decade to meet the habitat needs of riparian area species groups. (RLRMP page 2.76)

It is my finding that the actions of this decision comply with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976, NFMA implementing regulations in 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 219, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Endangered

Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations.

A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and EA were considered. 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.

The Proposed Action, which alters vegetation, complies with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). Under 16 U.S.C. 1604 (g)(3)(e). The Responsible Official may authorize site-specific projects and activities to harvest timber on National Forest System (NFS) lands only where:

1. Soil, Slope, or other watershed conditions will not be irreversibly damaged.
2. There is assurance that the lands can adequately be restocked within five years after final regeneration harvests (FSM 1921.12g).
3. Streams, stream banks, shorelines, lakes, wetlands, and other bodies of water are protected from detrimental changes in water temperatures, blockages of water courses, and deposits of sediment where harvests are likely to seriously and adversely affect water conditions of fish habitat.
4. The harvesting system to be used is not selected primarily because it will give the greatest dollar return or greatest unit output of timber.

The Responsible Official may authorize projects and activities on NFS lands using cutting methods such as clearcutting, seed tree cutting, shelterwood cutting, and other cuts designed to regenerate an even-aged stand of timber only where:

1. For clearcutting, it is the optimum method; or where seed tree shelterwood, and other cuts are determined to be appropriate to meeting the objectives and requirements of the relevant plan (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(F)(i)).
2. The interdisciplinary review has been completed and the potential environmental, biological, aesthetic, engineering, and economic impacts have been assessed on each advertised sale area and the cutting methods are consistent with the multiple use of the general area (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(F)(ii)).
3. Cut blocks, patches, or strips are shaped and blended to the extent practicable with the natural terrain (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(F)(iii)).
4. Cuts are carried out according to the maximum size limit requirements for areas to be cut during one harvest operation (FSM 1921.12e).
5. Timber cuts are carried out in a manner consistent with the protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, aesthetic resources, cultural and historic resources, and the regeneration of timber resources.

6. Stands of trees are harvested according to requirements for culmination of mean annual increment of growth (16 U.S.C. 1604 (m); FSM 1921.12f; FSH 1909.12, ch. 60).

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)

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 EA discloses the effects of exposure of forest users and the public to various hazards such as smoke, particulate matter, herbicides, hazards in the general forest, along with others and concludes that no thresholds will be exceeded and/or hazards that can't be mitigated (See EA pages III-12-III-18, III-71-III-74, and III-74-III-81)
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 concurrence on National Register eligibility and the avoidance of adverse effects by project implementation to historical properties was received from SHPO on October 15, 2012. This included a list of known and recorded archeological sites, their recommendations of eligibility for possible inclusion in the Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and avoidance of adverse effects (See EA pages III-81-III-84). In addition, the EA concludes the vegetative treatments would promote and enhance the recreational remarkable values for which the scenic river was designated by improving the scenic quality (See EA page III-24).
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 effects of the proposed action.

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.
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 the Purpose and Need for the project and the actions proposed in the PA are implementing and within the scope of the RLRMP(See EA pages I-1-I-6).
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. The Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions within the project area are listed on page II-13 of the EA. The cumulative effects of these actions along with the PA are disclosed throughout chapter III of the EA and conclude that there are no significant impacts (See EA pages III-1-III-84).
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 concurrence on National Register eligibility and the avoidance of adverse effects by project implementation to historical properties was received from SHPO on October 15, 2012. This included a list of known and recorded archeological sites, their recommendations of eligibility for possible inclusion in the Register of Historic Places (NRHP), and avoidance of adverse effects (See EA pages III-81-III-84). The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources because same as above (See EA pages III-81-III-84).
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 EA concluded, based on the findings of the BE sent to and concurred with by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, that the PA would was not likely to adversely affect the Indiana bat, Gray bat, or Ozark Big-eared bat. The EA also concludes that the PA could benefit the Isopod, Nearctic caddisfly, Longnose Darter, Bachman Sparrow, Ozark Chinquapin and Small-headed pipewort (See EA pages III-69-III71).
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 (see EA pages I-5-I-6 and I-8). The

action is consistent with the Ozark St.-Francis Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. (See EA pages I-2-I-3, I-5-I-6, and I-8)

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.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Appeals must meet requirements stated in 36 CFR 215.14 in order to be considered. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant (215.2) and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request are required pursuant 215.14 (3). A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in *The Courier*. The Notice of Appeal must be filed with: Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 605 West Main, Russellville, AR 72801. Appeals may be faxed to (479) 964-7229. Hand-delivered appeals must be delivered to the Ozark St.-Francis Supervisors Office in Russellville pursuant 36CFR215.15(a) within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-ozark-stfrancis@fs.fed.us.

Appeals should not be filed with the Responsible Official at either Hector or Jasper.

Who may appeal?

36 CFR 215.13 States that any person who submitted a substantive comment during the official 30 day comment period for an environmental assessment is eligible to file an appeal. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.9(a) when no appeal is filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period. (36 CFR 215.9 (b)) when an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition.

CONTACT

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Mike Mulford, NEPA Coordinator, Big Piney Ranger District, P.O. Box 427, Jasper, AR 72641; (870) 446-5122; fax (870) 446-2063; e-mail: mmulford@fs.fed.us.



Bruce C. Davenport

District Ranger



Date

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