# DRAFT DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
# NON-NATIVE INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES (NNIPS) PROJECT
# U.S. FOREST SERVICE
## CADDO-WOMBLE RANGER DISTRICT
## GARLAND, MONTGOMERY, PIKE, POLK, HOWARD AND HOT SPRING COUNTIES, ARKANSAS

## DECISION

Based upon my review of the NNIPS Project Environmental Assessment (EA), I have decided to implement the Proposed Action, which includes controlling known NNIPS infestation and future occurrences throughout the Caddo-Womble Ranger District using a combination of manual, mechanical, cultural, and chemical treatment methods. Associated project design criteria are provided on pages 15-16 of the EA.

### DECISION RATIONALE

The purpose of this action is to reduce, minimize, or eliminate the potential for introduction, establishment, spread, and impact of non-native invasive plant species (Southern Regional Framework for NNIS, p.1) by using an integrated pest management approach to prevent or reduce damage to forest resources from pest organisms, including non-native, invasive species (Revised Forest Plan, p. 58).

The NNIPSProject EA documents the environmental analysis and conclusions upon which this decision is based.

### PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Project Announcement Letter (PAL) or "scoping letter" was mailed to interested publics on January 31, 2020 requesting input on the proposed actions. The project was also published in the Ouachita National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions. No comments were received in response to this solicitation.

The EA was released for public review and comment on June 7, 2020; a legal notice of the 30-day comment period was published in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*. One comment was received.

### FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Ouachita National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. The project was designed in conformance with the Vision, Strategy, and Design Criteria direction.

## 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 NNIPS Project is located throughout the Caddo-Womble Ranger District in Garland, Montgomery, Pike, Polk, Howard and Hot Spring Counties, Arkansas.

### 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. Both beneficial and adverse effects were considered. (See EA Chapter 3)
2. **The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety**. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. (See EA page 19)
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. There are no park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, roadless areas, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas to be affected. The effects on historic or cultural resources are disclosed in the EA. (See EA page 45)
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. (See EA Chapter 3)
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 Chapter 3)
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 it is similar to projects that have previously been implemented and it is consistent with the direction of the Revised Forest Plan. (See EA Chapter 3)
7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.** The cumulative impacts are not significant. Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions have been assessed, and any resulting cumulative effects are disclosed in the EA. (See EA page 46)

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. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. (See EA page 18) A letter of concurrence was received from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on March 12, 2020.

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.** In a letter dated March 31, 2020, from the Arkansas Field Supervisor of the United States Department of Interior – Fish and Wildlife Service (USDI-FWS) to the Ouachita National Forest, Forest Supervisor, the USDI-FWS confirms that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) satisfied requirements under section 7(a)(2) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for actions in the 2005 Land Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) programmatic consultation (50 CFR §402.02) for all listed species present during analysis in the project area. The letter states that "since, the USFS satisfied its section 7 obligations pertaining the Forest Plan in 2005, it is not necessary to initiate consultation on individual projects implemented under the 2005 Forest Plan unless for one or more of the following reasons: 1. The amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded; 2. New information reveals effects of the agency's action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner, or to an extent, not previously considered; 3. The agency action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat not previously considered; and/or 4. A new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the action." Based on the rationale above, the Wildlife Biologist concludes that a letter of concurrence is not needed from US Fish and Wildlife Services for this project.

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 Ouachita National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan. (See EA page 47)

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.

## IMPLEMENTATION DATE

As per 36 CFR 218.12, if no objection is received within the legal objection period, this decision may be signed and implemented on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the objection filing period. If an objection is filed, this decision cannot be signed or implemented until the reviewing officer has responded in writing to all pending objections.

## CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Mary Brown, 1523 Hwy 270E, Mount Ida, AR 71957, (870) 867-2101

4/13/21

AMANDA GEE WALROD
District Ranger

Date

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