



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Mark Twain National Forest  
Potosi – Fredericktown  
Ranger District

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**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** August 3, 2004

Dear Neighbor,

## **INTRODUCTION**

This scoping letter summarizes a proposal for the Delbridge Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI) Project. The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments on the proposal.

## **LOCATION**

The project area is approximately 4,205 acres, of which approximately 4,175 acres is National Forest. It is located within and adjacent to the community of Delbridge, MO in, T36N, R1W, Sec. 25 & 28, T36N, R1E, Sec. 30-32, T35N, R1W, Sec. 1 & 12, T35N, R1E, Sec. 4-9, Washington County, Missouri.

## **BACKGROUND**

The 2001 National Fire Plan (NFP) laid the foundation for a long-term program to reduce fire risk and restore healthy, fire-adapted ecosystems on the nation's forests and grasslands. One of the guiding principals of the National Fire Plan is to "restore healthy, diverse and resilient ecological systems to minimize uncharacteristically severe fires on a priority watershed basis through long-term restoration". In 2002 the HFI was launched to reduce administrative delays for projects identified as meeting the goals of the NFP. This was followed by passage of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) in December 2003, which provides improved statutory processes for hazardous fuels reduction processes on certain types of at risk National Forest System lands and nearby communities.

The community of Delbridge, MO is identified as a community at risk in the Federal Register and the community is located within and around the project area.

## **FOREST PLAN DIRECTION**

The Forest Plan, approved in 1986, provides a programmatic framework regarding allocation of land and measures necessary to protect National Forest resources. It describes how different areas of the MTNF should be managed and what resources should be provided by these lands now and in the future. The Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) displays the forest-wide effects of activities such as timber harvest, wildlife habitat management, recreation management and visual resource management. Site-specific effects of those practices to this project are not part of the Forest Plan (FEIS). The Delbridge HFI proposal is compatible with Forest-wide management direction given in the Forest Plan.



## PURPOSE AND NEED

Hazardous fuel conditions create the potential for severe forest fires that could have a significant effect on the health and safety of the public and firefighters in the area. The ability to respond to and safely suppress potential fires is severely decreased by large fuel accumulations.

The Delbridge HFI Project area is made up largely of oak-hickory hardwood stands intermixed with oak-pines stands. The age and size of the stands of this area vary from young growing stock to mature trees. Historically, the landscape of the Delbridge area was maintained by fire and was much more open than today. However, after years of fire suppression and natural succession, these stands are denser and less resilient to fire and disease. In recent years portions of the area have been greatly affected by drought and the Red Oak Borer infestation which concentrates largely on the Scarlet and Black Oak species. These species are relatively short-lived, particularly on upper slopes and broad ridge tops, due in part to the drought susceptibility of the soils. These species are thought to have replaced the once dominant and more resilient Short Leaf Pines, White Oaks, and Post Oaks around the 1920's. Such stress has led to declining health of these species made obvious by a high level of mortality (both standing and down snags) and an increase in weakened trees (dead top branches and weakened root structure). Greater amounts of downed trees and branches along with standing snags have increased fuel loadings in the area. An increase of such fuels presents greater potential of problematic fire control and containment. Standing snags and dead tops present an increased danger to both Forest users and firefighters. Reduction of such fuels will provide for the safety of forest users, adjacent landowners, and others values at risk by reducing potential of catastrophic fire and reducing hazards from falling debris.

## PROPOSED ACTION

The primary purpose of the Delbridge HFI project analysis is to explore opportunities within the Delbridge project area that would improve forest health and reduce fuels. In particular, activities are considered that would reduce the threat of insects (primarily red-oak borer), wildfire, and disease within the project area. To reduce these threats, several actions are proposed. These actions would focus primarily on activities that would create a more resilient mix of tree species and reduce the density of trees within stands to a healthier, more sustainable level. This would be achieved by conducting treatments that would reduce the black and scarlet oak composition within stands, reduce the potential for damaging wildfires, and encourage the growth and regeneration of more resilient species such as shortleaf pine and white oak.

Summary of activities proposed for the Delbridge HFI Project

Proposed Activity	Approximate Area Affected
Timber Harvest (Thinnings)	748 acres
Prescribed burning	2,670 acres
Temporary roads constructed	2 miles
Miles of dozer-constructed fireline	5.5 miles

## **DECISION TO BE MADE**

The District Ranger of the Potosi/Fredericktown Ranger District is the official responsible for making a decision on this project. The decision to be made from this analysis is whether or not to implement the project as proposed.

## **HOW TO COMMENT**

Please send your comments to the above address by September 2, 2004. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact Chris Woods at the above address or phone number. Comments or requests for information may also be sent via the Internet to: [comments-eastern-mark-twain-potosi@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-eastern-mark-twain-potosi@fs.fed.us)

Sincerely,

*Janet Fraley*

JANET FRALEY  
Acting District Ranger