



File Code: 1950

Date: February 24, 2016

Dear Reader,

The Pleasant Hill Ranger District/Ozark National Forest is proposing the Brushy Mountain Project. We are inviting you to submit comments to help refine the proposed activities disclosed in this letter. In addition, the Responsible Official is currently preparing an environmental analysis of this proposal and needs your assistance to better identify issues, concerns, and opportunities. Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(a)(2), this proposed project implements the land management plan and is subject to §218 subparts A and B.

## PURPOSE AND NEED

The purposes and needs of this proposal reflect the guidelines of the four designated management areas recognized within the project area according to the 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP) for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests and are as follows:

### 1) High Quality Forest Products Management Area

- *Maintain appropriate conditions for wildlife habitat, soil productivity, water quality, recreational opportunity, and scenic beauty*
- *Support a balanced age class distribution*
- *Implement prescribed fire every 3 to 10 years*
- *Forest products contribute to the social and economic well-being of people*
- *Provide a variety of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities*

### 2) Mixed Forest Management Area

- *Manage for pine and oak woodlands on the lower quality sites*
- *Manage for medium density or balanced age classes on medium and high quality sites*
- *Implement prescribed burns on 3 to 10 year intervals*

### 3) Riparian Corridor Management Area

- *Maintain, restore, or enhance biological integrity of aquatic communities*
- *Identify roads and trails that should be reconstructed or decommissioned to reduce sediment and improve watershed conditions*
- *Include erosion and sediment control measures in all ground-disturbing project plans*
- *Ensure floodplains properly function as retention storage areas for floodwaters*
- *Maintain water quality within a range that ensures survival, growth, reproduction, and migration of aquatic and riparian wildlife species*



#### 4) Scenic Byway Corridor Management Area

- *Maintain or improve biological communities to provide attractive settings for visitors*
- *Provide for the protection of rare communities and threatened, endangered, sensitive, and locally rare species*
- *Preserve viewshed quality*
- *Develop public view points and interpretive opportunities*
- *Promote and manage the scenic byway for the traveling public and benefit of local communities*

#### 5) Designated Wild and Scenic River Management Area

- *Enhance and protect the outstandingly remarkable values and unique qualities*
- *Utilize vegetation management for scenic enhancement or rehabilitation to provide better recreational opportunities*
- *Manage to perpetuate free-flowing condition*

### PROPOSED ACTION

The project area is located in Franklin County, Arkansas. It is bounded on the north by the Mulberry River and State Highway 215; on the east by Low Bridge and Pink Twist Roads; on the west by State Highway 23; and on the south by the National Forest Boundary. The legal description of Brushy Mountain project area is T12N R27W Sections: 24, 25, 26, 35, 36; T11N R27W Sections: 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14; T12N R26W Sections: 19, 20, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34; T11N R26W Sections: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18. The compartments include 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 444, and 445. The project area encompasses approximately 17,107 total acres; 12,706 of National Forest and 4,401 acres of private.

All work proposed is on National Forest lands only. *No work would occur on privately-owned land.* However, the Forest Service would solicit cooperation with private landowners via Wyden/Stevens agreements, which allows the Forest Service to carry out prescribed burn treatments on private lands surrounded by or adjacent to federal land. Additionally, in the event that funding becomes available to install a waterline into Redding Campground, the Forest Service would work with appropriate government entities to secure the legal instrument needed to supply municipal water to this recreation area.

The following Management Prescriptions are currently proposed to be implemented within the Brushy Mountain project area.

#### Vegetation Management

**Pine Seedtree** – This is proposed on 2 mature stands totaling approximately 45 acres. This type of regeneration harvest would remove 90% of the overstory (10-20ft<sup>2</sup>/ac.). Site preparation would be done with handtool/herbicide treatments followed by a prescribed burn in order to prepare a proper seed bed. Natural and artificial regeneration would occur to re-stock the stands with an average 300 trees/acre. Following the establishment of the regenerated stand, release

treatments with handtools/herbicide may be needed to promote “free-to-grow” conditions. Once the new stand has been formed, the remaining mature overstory trees would be harvested.

**Pine Thinning** – This would occur on approximately 2,587 acres. Thinning would increase growth of residual trees, reduce susceptibility of the stand to insects and disease, and improve wildlife habitat. The stands would be thinned to an average basal area of 60-80 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre. Trees that are suppressed or display poor form would be removed. Large trees of good form and/or close to the correct spacing would be favored as leave trees. The target spacing of trees would depend on average tree diameter of the stand. Prescribed burning followed by thinning would provide beneficial effects for wildlife. Timber stand improvement (TSI) treatments of the midstory using herbicide and/or handtools may be utilized to further reduce competition and increase sunlight to developing regeneration.

**Hardwood Shelterwood with Reserves** – This would occur on 52 acres (two mature forest stands). This treatment would encourage long-term forest health, provide for the succession of early-seral habitat, and contribute to providing a sustainable forest. The objective of a shelterwood is to open up the stand allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor while leaving an adequate amount of trees to provide seed. As the name implies, several trees would be left in the overstory to give shelter to the developing seedlings on the ground. An average basal area of 20-40 ft<sup>2</sup> would be retained. With Reserves means the mature hardwood left over from the harvests would remain until the new stands receive their first thinning. The combination of stump/root sprouts from oak species and the other existing desirable seedlings would establish the new stands; hand-planting of oak seedlings may also occur.

Following harvest, these stands would have handtools/herbicide applied to undesirable stems, then burned to prepare the site for natural/artificial regeneration. Needed release treatments by either handtools and/or herbicide 1-5 years after seedling establishment would also take place.

**Hardwood Thinning** – Thinning is proposed on 8 stands, totaling 282 acres. This treatment would increase growth of residual trees, reduce susceptibility of the stand to insects and disease, and improve wildlife habitat. The stands would be thinned to a target basal area of 55-70 ft<sup>2</sup>/acre. Trees that are suppressed or possess poor form would be removed. Trees of good form and/or close to the correct spacing would be favored. The target spacing of trees would depend on average tree diameter of the stand. Prescribed burning followed by thinning would provide benefits for wildlife. TSI treatments of the midstory using herbicide and/or handtools may be utilized to further reduce competition.

**The following road work would be done to access timber stands, improve/maintain watershed and riparian conditions, and protect/enhance wildlife habitat:**

**Reconstruction** – Approximately 10 miles of old, existing roads would be reconstructed within the project area. These roads are situated on somewhat stable templates that display signs of age where spots of erosion are occurring and drainage crossings are crumbling. Reconstruction would help stabilize, thereby reducing erosion and sediment from reaching streams.

**Maintenance** – Approximately 35 miles of open and closed roads would receive maintenance within the project area in order to obtain suitable road conditions for hauling timber. County roads anticipated to be used are regularly maintained by their respective counties, along with Forest Service assistance. Closed roads would temporarily be opened during timber/silvicultural activities and immediately closed again with gates or mounds after all activities have been completed to reduce erosion caused from vehicle traffic and protect wildlife habitat.

**Decommission** – Approximately 19 miles of existing roads no longer needed for management or access would be decommissioned within the project area. This entails restoring roads to a more natural state. Activities used to decommission a road would include, but are not limited to the following: re-establishing former drainage patterns, stabilizing slopes, restoring vegetation, blocking the entrance to the road, installing water bars (earthen mounds), and removing culverts. Unnamed and illegally accessed off-highway vehicles (OHV) trails present in the project area may be closed using debris, rocks, earthen mounds, or gates.

**Temporary roads** – Approximately 7 miles of temporary roads would be needed to access timber stands. These roads would be blocked, and then rehabilitated with seeding and/or natural re-vegetation. Temporary roads would not be intended to be included as part of the forest transportation system as they are managed for short-term projects or activities, followed by decommissioning after use.

#### **Access**

Adjacent landowners whose property blocks access to Federal land will be contacted by the Forest Service. Neighbors of the forest will be asked to consider allowing entrance to these otherwise inaccessible areas for forest management and fire protection.

#### **Wildlife Habitat Improvement**

**Wildlife Opening (New Construction)** – Ten new wildlife openings would be constructed. Some of these are linear openings which will utilize areas cleared previously on utility corridors. Other openings would be constructed in areas where timber harvest occurs. Two existing openings are proposed to be increased in size. The total acreage for all wildlife openings would be approximately 19 acres. Stumps, remnant trees and logging debris will be cleared from opening locations with heavy equipment. Openings will then be disked and seeded with cool season or warm season herbaceous species to provide early seral forage for wildlife. Openings would be fertilized and limed and maintained periodically by the use of herbicide application, mowing, disking, seeding, fertilizing and liming.

**Existing Wildlife Openings (Reconstruction)** – Twenty-two existing wildlife openings comprising approximately 41 acres would have various levels of reconstruction completed on them. Encroaching hardwood, cedar, and pine trees would be removed from inside and around the perimeters of the openings with heavy equipment. Disking, seeding, fertilization, liming, and herbicide application would be utilized to improve these openings and provide early seral cool season habitat for wildlife.

**Wildlife Stand Improvement (WSI)** – Approximately 318 acres of WSI is proposed in the project area. This treatment would be utilized to restore open woodland condition to low quality timber areas. Selective herbicide application, chainsaw felling and/or mechanical means would be used to reduce basal area to approximately 50 square feet/acre. This would allow for greater light penetration to the forest floor and provide increases in herbaceous species diversity and abundance. Game species such as white-tail deer and turkey would benefit from this activity. Disturbance dependent neo-tropical migratory birds would also benefit. TES bat species would benefit from habitat improvement as well as rare plants such as small-headed pipewort.

**Glade Restoration** – Approximately 4 acres of glade restoration is proposed for this project. This treatment would remove encroaching hardwood, cedar, and pine trees from a glade which contains small-headed pipewort which is a Forest Service Region 8 sensitive plant species (rare plant). This work would be accomplished by selective herbicide application, chainsaw felling, and/or mechanical means.

**Wildlife Habitat Improvement Prescribed Fire** – Approximately 4,162 acres of prescribed burning to improve wildlife habitat are proposed for this project. This would benefit TES plant and animal species, improve woodland conditions and plant diversity, improve habitat for game species (white-tail deer and turkey) and neotropical migratory birds and resident birds which are disturbance dependent. All WSI and glade restoration areas are located within the proposed burn units. Burn units primarily utilize natural barriers and roads for control lines and would require minimal fire line application, mowing, disking, seeding, fertilizing and liming.

**Gates** – Twelve gates and/or gates in combination with fences would be constructed at the locations of new wildlife openings constructed under this proposal. Gates would be placed on access driveways to wildlife openings and would not block any system roads. Gates would provide seclusion to wildlife using the openings, prevent damage to openings from vehicles and provide for increased hunter experience and success.

**Large Woody Debris (LWD)** – Large woody debris would be placed within approximately 9.4 miles of stream channels within the project area. Larger diameter trees will be felled with chainsaws into stream channels to improve fish habitat, increase pool formation in stream channels and assist with bank stability.

**Prescribed Fire** – All Forest Service land within the Brushy Mountain project area would potentially receive low to moderate intensity prescribed burns to reduce hazardous fuels and wildfire risk, improve wildlife habitat, and for silvicultural purposes. Special attention would be given to all pine stands in which only low-intensity burning would take place in order to promote pine regeneration. Knutson-Vandenberg (KV) retained receipt funded prescribed fire would be implemented on all acres possible within KV sale area boundaries surrounding pine thinning units.

Prescribed fire treatments may occur on private lands located within the Brushy Mountain project areas, but only after consultation with landowners and a prescribed fire agreement under the Wyden Amendment (Section 334(a) of Public Law 105-83) and/or Stevens agreements in cooperation with the Arkansas Forestry Commission. Should agreements with private

landowners be signed, private lands would be burned by the Arkansas Forestry Commission under prescription in conjunction with prescribed burns on public lands.

Prescribed fire would serve to re-introduce fire into a fire-adapted ecosystem, promote pine regeneration, promote regeneration in shelterwood and seedtree harvest areas, maintain pine stands in open conditions, increase herbaceous understory species density and diversity, improve habitat conditions for fire-dependent special-status plants, increase soft-mast production and reduce potentially hazardous accumulations of fuels on the forest floor, and improve wildlife habitat conditions.

### **Developed Recreation Improvements**

**Redding Campground** – If funding becomes available, improvements to the Redding Campground would include providing municipal water to the campground by accessing the Watalula municipal water system. This would eliminate the need for water testing and the need for a well system that is currently in place. If approved, the current water system would be decommissioned upon successfully connecting to Watalula municipal water source.

### **HOW TO COMMENT**

Specific written comments as defined by §218.2 should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. While comments will be accepted any time during the process, to establish standing for objection eligibility, this designated opportunity is between February 29, 2016 and March 30, 2016.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on these proposed actions and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. A 30-day Notice and Comment period will be provided at a future date (§218.24). Only those who respond to this request for comments will remain on the mailing list for this project.

Specific written comments must be submitted to: Pat Kowalewycz, District Ranger, 2591 Hwy 21 N. Clarksville, AR. 72830, fax (479-754-3017), office (479-754-2864). The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a common digital format to [comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-pleasanthill@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-pleasanthill@fs.fed.us).

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. For objection eligibility (§218.5), only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the

proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

Please state "Brushy Mountain" in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Additional information on Brushy Mountain Project is also available on the webpage: [www.fs.fed.us/r8/osfnf/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/osfnf/). If you would like more information or have questions relating to this proposal, please contact Matt Pfeifler, NEPA Coordinator, by email ([mtpfeifler@fs.fed.us](mailto:mtpfeifler@fs.fed.us)) or by phone (479-754-2864).

Sincerely,

  
PAT KOWALEWYCZ  
District Ranger

enclosure: