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**File Code:** 1920  
**Date:** MAR 14 2016

Dear Friends and Partners of Midewin:

The new Land and Resources Management Planning regulations published in 2012 (the 2012 Planning Rule - 36 CFR 219) changed the Forest Plan monitoring program requirements from earlier planning regulations. Units with existing monitoring programs established within a forest/prairie plan must update their program to include new monitoring elements (See 36 CFR 219.12(c) (1)). All units are required to have monitoring programs that meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule approved by the responsible officials by May 9, 2016.

Therefore, we are proposing changes to our Prairie Plan monitoring program to ensure that our monitoring program meets the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. Some existing monitoring elements will remain as required by law or regulation such as those associated with compliance with the National Forest Management Act and the Illinois Land and Conservation Act.

We have used this opportunity to review and update our current monitoring program. The proposed changes to some of our existing monitoring questions will help create consistency with the new required elements, and improve the monitoring data received. Information gathered from updated monitoring data will help increase our success in meeting the goals, objectives and desired future condition of the Prairie Plan. Changes to our monitoring program are considered an administrative change to the prairie plan (36 CFR 219.13(c)) and do not require a plan amendment. Once the final changes to the monitoring program are issued, there will be no opportunity for objection to this action because the pre-decisional administrative review procedures outlined in 36 CFR 219 Subpart B do not apply to administrative changes.

For the monitoring topics that are required to be addressed, agency guidance was reviewed; consultation with appropriate monitoring specialists was completed; and the best available scientific information was considered before identifying and/or modifying monitoring questions and indicators. Based on that information, the existing monitoring program is being modified. The proposed changes to the monitoring program are available for review at our website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/midewin/home/?cid=FSEPRD494270>

Please be advised these changes are preliminary and may be altered further based on additional evaluation and input from our monitoring partners and comments received.



Most of the concepts from the current monitoring table were incorporated in the proposed changes. The proposed changes now focuses the monitoring program and clearly defines what we are monitoring and why. Some proposed changes to the monitoring program are:

- The switch from issuing annual monitoring and evaluation reports to a biennial reporting schedule.
- Altering language of the monitoring program based on the new planning rule.
- The revision of the monitoring table reorganizes the monitoring information into the eight required topics from the 2012 Planning Rule with accompanying questions and indicators.
- Previous monitoring questions were redefined to apply to specific monitoring topics and the new planning rule.

We invite you to provide comments regarding the proposed changes to the monitoring program for the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in order to meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. The comment period is for 30 days from the date of this letter.

If you have any questions regarding the monitoring program update process or comments on the proposed changes to the monitoring program, please contact Jeff Tepp, Acting NEPA Planner, by emailing to [Mailroom\\_R9\\_Midewin\\_Natioanl\\_Tallgrass\\_Prairie@fs.fed.us](mailto:Mailroom_R9_Midewin_Natioanl_Tallgrass_Prairie@fs.fed.us) , by phone at 815-423-6370 or mail comments to:

Prairie Supervisor  
Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie  
Attn: Jeff Tepp  
30239 South State Route 53  
Wilmington, IL 60481

Thank you for your support and interest in Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Sincerely,



WADE A. SPANG  
Prairie Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: Jeffery Tepp