



Decision Memo

Highway 59 Tornado Salvage Project USDA Forest Service Boston Mountain Ranger District

Ozark-St. Francis National Forests

Crawford County Arkansas

Background

The Boston Mountain Ranger District of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests USDA Forest Service is proposing to salvage trees damaged by a recent tornado on approximately 185 acres of National Forest land on the Lee Creek Unit northwest of Highway 59 in Crawford County, Arkansas. The project area is on Forest Service lands in sections 2 and 11 in T12N, R33W (figure 1). The intense winds of the tornado caused trees in the damaged area to become severely root sprung and/or completely knocked down to the ground or snapped off at the trunks several feet above the ground.

Decision and Rationale for Categorical Exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act

I have decided to implement the Highway 59 Tornado Salvage Project in which approximately 100 acres of hardwood and cedar timber within the damaged area would be salvaged (removed) and commercially sold. An incidental amount of undamaged cedar and hardwoods will also be removed. The remaining damaged timber on 85 acres where damage is sporadic and sparse along both sides of Hwy 59, would be offered through fire wood and salvage permits that can be obtained at the district office located in Ozark, Arkansas. After salvage operations are complete, logging slash may be piled and burned, followed with two mechanical or manual chainsaw treatments that would take place over a five year period to reduce stocking levels while favoring native mast tree species and promoting free to grow conditions.

An existing closed road in the area (95573F) will be used to access the damaged area to the south. This section of road will be seeded, water barred if necessary and closed off by gate after completion of project activities.

Up to 0.4 miles of temporary road, will be needed in the north end of the project area. This road will be rehabbed to natural state at sale closure; seeded/slashed in, water barred if necessary and closed off. To access the project area, two crossings will occur on Mountain Fork Creek. These will be armored with rock on both approaches.

Based on my review of the project file and the rationale described below, I have determined that this is an action with no associated extraordinary circumstances having a significant effect on the human environment. The Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1507.3 provide that agencies may, after notice and comment, adopt categories of actions that typically do not have a significant effect on



the human environment and therefore do not require preparation of an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement (40 CFR 1500.4(p), 1501.4(a)(2), 1508.4).

A categorical exclusion is not an exemption from NEPA, but rather a method of complying with NEPA. Categorical exclusions are administrative tools to promote efficiency in the NEPA review process by reducing excessive paperwork for those categories of actions that, based upon extensive practice and experience, have been determined not to have (individually or cumulatively) significant environmental effects. Forest Service categorical exclusions are set forth at 36 CFR 220.6(e).

A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and if:

(1) The proposed action is within one of the categories established by the Secretary at 7 CFR part 1b.3; or

(2) The proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR 220.6(d) or (e).

The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion (CE). It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions, and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. I have determined that this action is within the following category:

36 CFR 220.6(e) (13) *Salvage of dead and/or dying trees not to exceed 185 acres...The proposed action may include incidental removal of live or dead trees for landings, skid trails, and road clearing...*

I have considered the following resource conditions in my determination of the presence of extraordinary circumstances and whether the extraordinary circumstances that are related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement:

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species

There will be no negative impacts to threatened, endangered or sensitive species and their habitats.

- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

This project is within a municipal watershed. Best Management Practices (BMPs) for hauling operations will be followed to ensure the protection of water



quality in Mountain Fork Creek which will include armoring the crossings. Wetlands will not be affected.

c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas

None occur, so there will be no impact.

d. Inventoried roadless areas

None occur, so there will be no impact.

e. Research natural areas

None occur, so there will be no impact.

f. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas

All sites will be protected from any ground disturbing activities associated with this proposed action.

Public Involvement

A proposal to implement the Highway 59 Tornado Salvage Project was first provided to the public, tribes, and other agencies for comment on 7 April 2016. The proposal was mailed to persons owning land adjacent to the proposed activities and to people who have expressed an interest in activities conducted by the Boston Mountain Ranger District. In all, 42 scoping letters were mailed. No responses were received.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision is consistent with the Revised Ozark-St. Francis National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP 2005). The planning process that guides this management plan is in compliance with the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (16 U.S.C. 528-531). The overall goal of managing Forest Service lands is to sustain the multiple uses of its renewable resources in perpetuity while maintaining the long-term productivity of the land. Resources are to be managed so they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people. This project was designed in conformance with forest plan decisions to protect and improve renewable resource quality while maximizing net public benefits.

The management practices associated with these actions involve the manipulation of vegetation. Specifically these practices shall:



1. *Be best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the area with potential environmental, biological, cultural, aesthetic, engineering and economic impacts, as stated in the regional guide and forest plan considered.*

The project meets the intent of the Forest Plan and the multiple use goals of the area. No significant environmental impacts are predicted.

2. *Be chosen after considering the potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.*

These practices were chosen after considering the potential effects on the adjacent area. No effects are anticipated for residual trees and adjacent stands.

3. *Avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources.*

This project avoids permanent impairment of site productivity and ensures conservation of soil and water resources.

4. *Provide the desired effects on water quantity and quality, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.*

These practices do not significantly change the noted qualities of the area.

The management practices associated with these actions do not have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on the human health or the environment of minority or low-income populations (Executive Order 12898, 2/11/94).

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is covered by appeal regulations found at 36 CFR Part 215. Since only supportive comments were received during the comment period for the proposed project, the project is not subject to appeal. The project may proceed immediately.

WILLIAM DUNK
District Ranger

date



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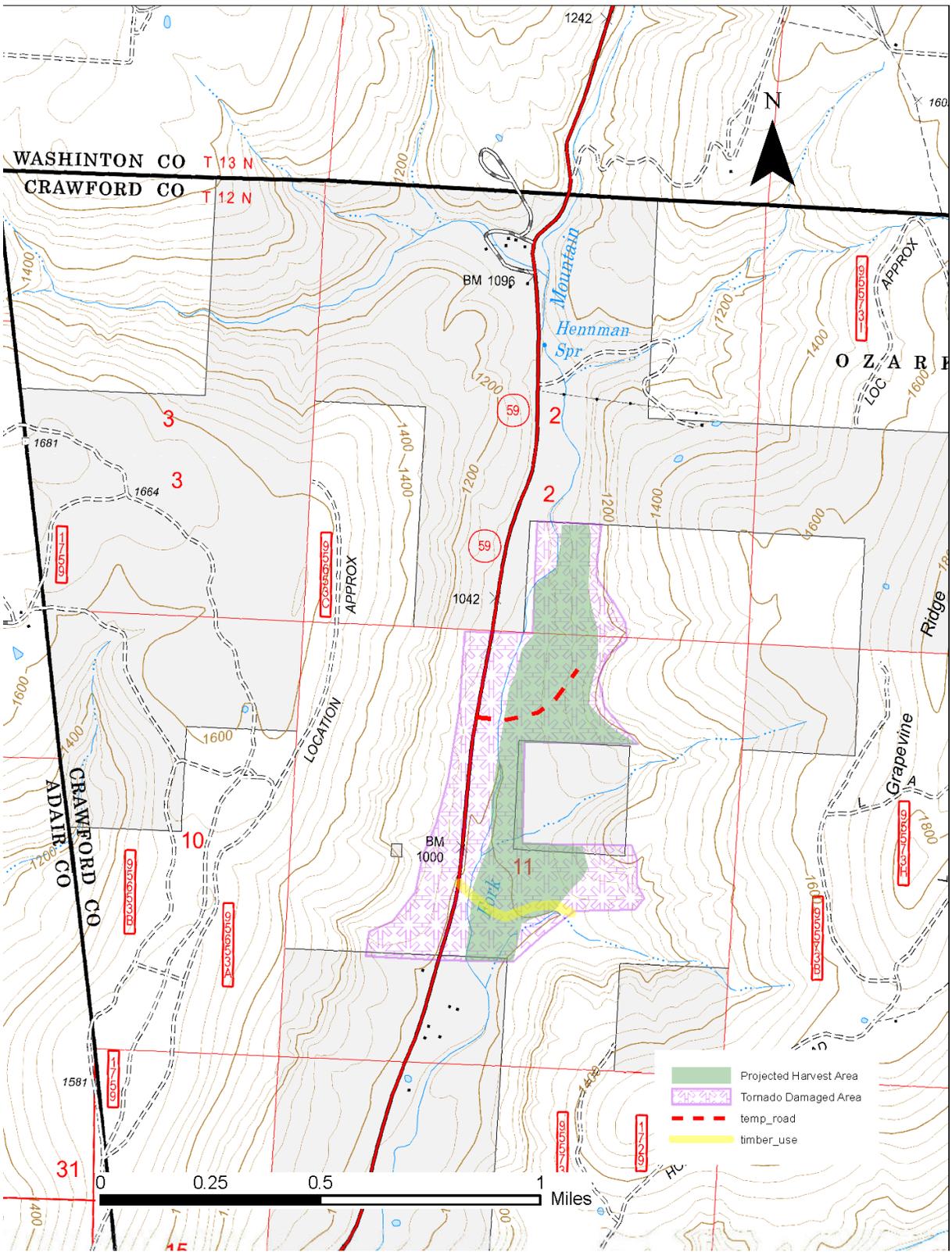


Figure 1. Map of affected area.