

# **Sunny Oaks Design Criteria, Mitigations and Forest Plan Guideline Departures**

## **Design Criteria and Mitigations**

1. Keep one way in/out of Elkins Creek Horse Camp open at all times. Implement prescribed fire activities so that any temporary trail closure only impacts one of the two ways in/out at a time.
2. Communicate with Elkins Creek Horse Camp on timing of prescribed burns so high-visitor period are avoided to the extent practical, and so rider events are not scheduled during burn windows.
3. John's Creek Trailhead: have hauling on FR 607, not the road accessing the trailhead. Use signs on the trail to notify horse riders of forestry activities and the two times trail will cross haul road.
4. Dean State Connector: If physically possible & economically feasible, permanently re-route the segment of the Dean State Connector that is proposed to be used as a haul route for Sunny Oaks. This segment has pre-existing drainage issues that make permanently re-routing desirable. However, if not possible or feasible, then temporarily re-route so no trail closure is needed.
5. Select temp or permanent reroutes of horse trails out of harvest units over closures. Discussed this as being possible for all situations where horse trail is in harvest units. If discover that it's not possible, then look to no weekend harvest operations in the timber sale contracts.
6. For the Symmes Creek and Morgan Sisters Trail Systems – consider current or planned usage of the trail during timber sale layout.
7. Coville's phacelia (RFSS plant): conduct prescribed fire as much as practical in known locations in the fall and winter. If spring burn is needed, delay the next entry to allow for population recovery.
8. Work with a biologist to locate haul roads in areas where the northern metalmark has recently been detected so as to not eliminate any population.
9. Provide a no harvest buffer along roadsides where the northern metalmark has recently been detected
10. In spring burns apply a no burn buffer (light interior) and/or wetline roadsides where the northern metalmark has recently been detected.
11. Work with adjacent landowners to determine where reasonable no-harvest buffers can be applied to reduce visual impacts to private landowners at their homes. When buffers are

put in place, make them irregular (i.e. not straightline), and feather into the temporary opening so that it does not appear the edge of the harvest is the property boundary.

12. Consider where to apply buffers along open roads and trails to screen the harvests from view.

### **Departures from Forest Plan Guidelines**

The Forest Plan allows for deviations from guidelines. Page 6 in Chapter 1 states, “Guidelines are preferred limits to management actions and are expected to be followed. They help the Forest to reach the desired conditions and fulfill objectives, but in contrast to standards, guidelines permit some operational flexibility to respond to variations needed for specific situations.”

The reasoning for the departures are explained below.

**G-FSM-WLF-1:** Temporary openings in the forest canopy, resulting from even-aged timber harvest, should vary in size from 2 to 30 acres to provide habitat for a variety of early successional species, including those that do not use smaller openings. 21 harvests would be over 30 acres.

**GFW-VEG-2:** Locate even-aged, final regeneration harvests in time and space so that temporary openings are at least 500 feet apart. Regenerated stands following even-aged timber regeneration harvest, such as clearcuts, two-aged cuts, and shelterwood harvests, will no longer be considered openings when trees in the new stand have reached a height of 20 feet.

**GFW-SM-60:** Vegetation management which creates temporary openings should strive to:

- Feather heights of clearing edges; leave full-crowned trees as leave trees.
- Feathering is the partial cutting of trees along the cutting unit boundary to create transition in vegetation height and/or density between the opening and adjacent forest canopy. Feathering is appropriate in all zones high scenic integrity objectives and is required in all Concern Level 1 areas. Feathering is accomplished by using several different techniques singly or in combination. Possible techniques include:
  - Leaving the existing understory just inside the cutting unit boundary
  - Thinning the overstory canopy along the interior edge of the cutting unit boundary
  - Leaving vegetation of progressively greater height from the interior of the cutting unit to the boundary.

The technique used depends heavily on site conditions and should be determined on a case-by-case basis. The width of the feathered edge should at a minimum equal the height of adjacent uncut stand.

- In Concern Level 1 and 2 travelways and use areas, treat slash resulting from harvest or other management activity so it is no higher than 2 feet above the surface of the ground at least 100 feet from edge of road, trail, or use area, by lopping, chopping, crushing, burning, chipping, or removal, or a combination of these methods.
- Highlight and maintain character trees, such as large-diameter trees, “wolf trees,” open-grown trees, mast-producing trees, etc.
- Keep temporary openings 500 feet apart with a stand of trees at least 20 feet tall.

**GFW-SM-63:** Screen log landings as viewed from Concern Level 1 and 2 travelways and use areas and water bodies. Rehabilitate log landings after project completion to mimic natural openings.

**GFW-SM-68:** Allow no more than 30 contiguous acres of a clear-cut or seed-tree regeneration area with a leave-tree basal area of less than 10 square feet per acre to be visible from the travelway (open road or trail).

**GFW-SM-69:** Avoid numerous even-aged regeneration areas in close proximity (no closer than 500 feet) during the same planning cycle.

**GFW-SM-73:** No more than 15 contiguous acres of a clear-cut or seed-tree regeneration area should be visible from any given point on a travelway.

**GFW-SM-80:** Locate all log landings out of sight in travelways with a high scenic integrity objective.

**RATIONALE FOR DEPARTURES:** The proposed harvests respond to the urgency to create young, brushy forest on the Wayne National Forest, while also taking into consideration the existing landownership patterns, and stand ages within the project area.

- **The Urgency:** The Forest Plan calls for approximately 6-8% of the Forest Shrubland Mosaic management area across the Wayne to be covered in young, brushy forest. This percentage range was developed in order to provide a mix of habitats best suited to provide for a diversity of plants and animals. However, 0.01 % (2.5 acres out of 21,219 Forest Shrubland Mosaic management area on the Ironton Ranger District) of Wayne lands in this management area on the Ironton Ranger District are currently in this condition. This means that the Wayne is not providing habitat to those species.
- **The Landownership Patterns:** Private land is interspersed within the Wayne National Forest on all Units. This means that when developing a project the planning team must take into consideration which forest stands are adjacent to open, public roads (i.e. likely easier access) versus those that are located behind private land or are upland of open

roads in valley bottoms (i.e. likely need to work with other land owners to cross their lands).

- **The Stand Ages:** The planning team that developed this project looked at the urgent need to create young, brushy forest within the context of the landownership pattern and the current stand ages in the project area. Stands that are under ~60 years in age would not result in viable commercial timber sales, and they also are just not really ready to harvest – they need time to grow.
- **Meeting the Intent:** The implementation of the forested travel corridors in the larger timber harvests, which connect riparian filterstrips to mature, forest on the other side of the harvest, will meet the intent of the 40-acres threshold by taking potentially larger clearcut areas and breaking them up into smaller patches separated by forested strips.
- For scenery management guidelines, the District Ranger will consider on a case by case basis where buffer strips should be applied in order to screen the seen area from travel ways such as roads and trails.