

Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Revised Land and Resource Management Plan

Amendment #5 Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation

Amendment #5 amends the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP) to address needs related to bat conservation. Monitoring data and results for threatened, endangered, and sensitive bats for the RLRMP, in addition to new scientific literature concerning bats, indicated a need to amend the RLRMP. The changes to the RLRMP were identified through collaboration with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southern Research Station, and other partners. The amendment to the Forest-Wide Standards and Silvicultural Prescriptions in the RLRMP will provide for better management of bat habitat and protection of bats across the Forests. The RLRMP is amended as follows:

Forest-Wide Standards

On page 3-8 replace the text for FW48 with:

FW48 Optimal overstory density within the secondary zone around Indiana bat hibernacula is a range of 50 to 70 percent canopy closure. Use timber harvest, non-commercial thinning, and prescribed fire as needed to regulate and maintain this optimal density.

During normal order of entry for compartments within Indiana bat secondary conservation zones, do landscape scale analysis of existing forest stand conditions. This analysis should be used to determine commercial and non-commercial treatments needed to shift percent canopy closure toward the optimal overstory density. The long-term goal of treatments is to adjust canopy closure so that 80 to 90 percent of the secondary conservation zone is within the 50 to 70 percent canopy closure range. This will not be fully accomplished during this planning period. Annually report canopy cover adjustments accomplished with commercial and non-commercial treatments within Indiana bat conservation zones to the Arkansas Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

When designating trees to be cut to regulate overstory density, two approaches are recommended for equating canopy density to target leave basal area. A simple rule of thumb is to use site index minus 10 as the target leave basal area. Another option is the use of canopy density/basal area conversion charts defined by tree diameter classes.

On page 3-9 replace the text for FW52 with:

FW52 Prescribed burn plans for areas containing caves or for areas near significant caves or mines will identify these sites as smoke sensitive targets. The

prescribed burn plans will be written to minimize active combustion and smoldering phase smoke from entering these sites when bats are present.

On page 3-10 replace the text for FW64, FW66, FW67, and FW69 with:

FW64 All activities proposed within primary Indiana bat conservation zones will be coordinated with the USFWS and conservation and recovery of the Indiana bat will be the management priority for those actions.

FW66 Cutting of potential Indiana bat roost trees (trees three inches or greater diameter at breast height) is restricted from August 15 to November 30 in primary Indiana bat conservation zones and in Indiana bat priority roosting zones for caves with fall swarming Indiana bats. Cutting of potential Indiana bat roost trees as described above is also restricted from March 1 to April 30 in the primary Indiana bat conservation zones for caves with hibernating Indiana bats. Indiana bat priority roosting zones are mapped in coordination with USFWS based on habitat quality and bat use patterns around caves with the intent of protecting core use areas encompassing a minimum of 100 acres per Indiana bat hibernaculum. Management activities within the priority roosting zones would emphasize Indiana bat roosting habitat and ensure a continual supply of quality roosting trees.

~~FW67 Tree cutting and salvage operations can occur between December 1 and March 15 without a site-specific inventory. Additional coordination with USFWS is not required. – this standard is deleted.~~

FW69 Live trees, snags, buildings, and other structures known to have been used as roosts by Indiana bats and female northern long-eared bats are protected from cutting and/or intentional modification until they are no longer suitable as a roosting structure (trees no longer standing) unless their cutting or modification is needed to protect public or employee safety. Where roost tree cutting or modification is deemed necessary, it must be coordinated with the USFWS. Prescribed burns may proceed without special protection for roost trees except for active Indiana bat maternity trees.

On page 3-11 replace the text for FW71 with:

FW71 Protections are established around gray bat maternity and hibernation colony sites and Ozark big-eared bat maternity sites, bachelor sites, and winter colony sites. Cutting of overstory vegetation is prohibited within a 200-foot buffer around these sites. Within ¼ mile of the sites, there will be no new permanent development, such as construction of roads, trails, wildlife openings, pastures or special use right of ways unless required to access private property. Exceptions may be made where coordination with USFWS determines these activities to be compatible with recovery of these species.

On page 3-11 add FW163 under FW71:

FW163 If Indiana bat maternity trees are discovered within the Forests, those trees and other trees used by the colony would be protected. No tree falling would occur within 150 feet of known maternity trees unless their cutting or modification is needed to protect public or employee safety. Where tree cutting or modification

is deemed necessary within this area, it must be coordinated with the USFWS. Prior to prescribed fire, fuels would be removed from around known maternity trees to prevent damage during the burn. During the maternity period (April 1 to August 15), activities that may disturb the colonies, such as timber harvest, use of heavy equipment, and prescribed fire would be prohibited in an area approximately ¼ mile from known maternity roost trees. Variation in the buffer distance would be coordinated with USFWS and may include type of activity or topography that would shield the maternity site from the disturbance. Efforts would be made to determine the location of roost trees used by the colony prior to proceeding with forest management in the vicinity of the colony. If it is determined with USFWS that the colony has abandoned the site, the protections are no longer required except to maintain known roost trees, as per revised FW69.

Appendix A – Definitions

On page A-14, add the following definition between mast tree and mechanical site preparation:

Maternity tree – A live tree or snag used as a roost by a pregnant or lactating female bat or bat pups. Use by a female during the maternity season, even without evidence of reproductive status, will be assumed maternity use.

On page A-23, add the following definition between rollover and rotation:

Roost tree – A live tree or snag used as a day roosting structure by one or more bats.

Appendix F – Silviculture Prescription Descriptions

On pages F-8 to F-9, replace the description for 110 Indiana Bat with:

110 Indiana Bat – The purpose of this prescription is to maintain or enhance habitat for Indiana bats. Follow guidelines set forth in Forest-Wide Standards 33, 47, 48, 68, 69, and 70 for Indiana Bat management. Manage the diverse landscapes within the Indiana bat conservation zones with Silviculture Prescriptions 103, 104, 106, 113, or 114. Thin to maintain target canopy closure and regenerate stands using harvest methods with leave tree reserves, retaining overstory trees to provide high-quality roost trees over time. If needed, girdle select leave trees to maintain sufficient high-quality roost trees. Manage prescribed burning intervals to reduce mid-story clutter and promote groundcover to improve bat foraging conditions; some longer intervals may be needed to promote natural regeneration to attain desired tree composition, spacing and canopy closure. Management of rare habitats, such as glades and cane breaks within Indiana bat conservation zones, require specialized management strategies not described in the silvicultural prescriptions.

Appendix I – Monitoring: Table I-2 Monitoring Summary Table Mandatory Items

On page I-3, add this to Table 1-2: Monitoring Summary Table Mandatory Items:

| Resource Area | Monitoring Need | Measurement Frequency | Reporting Frequency | Precision and Reliability |
|---------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| Wildlife | Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive bat populations and habitat utilization are monitored. Long-term population trends, species distributions and habitat use patterns are monitored to inform management strategies. | Annual | 2 years | High |

The documentation for this amendment to the RLRMP is in the Decision Notice and Environmental Assessment for the Forest Plan Amendment for Bat Conservation project. This amendment to the RLRMP becomes effective upon the signature below accompanied by posting on the Forests' website. This amendment to the RLRMP will remain in effect until a revision of the 2005 RLRMP is made.



LORI D. WOOD

Forest Supervisor, Ozark-St. Francis National Forests



Date