



File Code: 1950-1

Date: December 3, 2008

Dear Forest Neighbor:

The U.S. Forest Service is proposing a series of fuels reduction activities on a portion of the Mio Ranger District of the Huron-Manistee National Forests. This project is known as the Lost Creek Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project (Lost Creek Project). We are preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project using guidelines set forward by the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003.

Background

The Lost Creek Project is made up of a variety of activities to help meet natural resource management objectives. These objectives are based on multiple-use management in compliance with the Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The project area and the Huron National Forest in general, have a history of large destructive wildfires that can be life threatening, destroy homes and property, and cause damage to natural resources. Producing timber and creating wildlife habitat are also important parts of managing natural resources within the project area and local community.

Project Location

The proposed actions are located on National Forest System lands west of Mio in Oscoda County, Michigan. The legal descriptions of the areas where actions are proposed are as follows:

- T26N, R1E, sections 1,2,3,10,11,12,14;
- T26N, R2E, sections 6,7,8,9,15,16,17,18
- T26N, R3E, sections 5

Please refer to the attached map for specific locations of proposed actions.

A detailed map and project information can also be viewed at the following website:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/hmnf/pages/PlanningandProjects/mio.htm>

Purpose and Need

This project area was selected because past history indicates a high likelihood of a major wildfire occurring within this general area. The configuration of vegetation and location of residential areas constitute a very real threat to life, property, and wildlife habitat. The intent of this project is to provide defensible space, through vegetation treatments, where wildfire suppression activities can more safely and efficiently be conducted on National Forest System Lands.

The project is designed to move the area towards the desired future condition set forth in the Forest Plan by meeting the goals and objectives for the specific Management Areas (MA).

Forest-wide goals and objectives include:

- Implement fuels reduction and fuelbreak projects where conditions warrant for the protection of life, property and safety. (Forest Plan, page II-3)
- Use of fire to mimic natural processes (Forest Plan, page II-3)



- Meet species viability needs, achieve fire hazard reduction, and accomplish fiber production from regulated and non-regulated forest lands primarily through timber harvest. (Forest Plan, page II-4)
- Reduce non-native invasive species (NNIS) infestations and prevent new invasive species from becoming established, when possible (Forest Plan, page II-4)
- Restore and maintain savannahs, prairies, dry grasslands, mesic grasslands, shrub/scrub and oak/pine barrens in areas where they were known to previously occur, to provide for habitat diversity and to meet species viability needs. (Forest Plan, page II-4)

The specific purpose and need of the Lost Creek Project is to:

- **Protect public and firefighter safety** during future wildland fire events by treating and reducing hazardous fuels. The purpose for hazardous fuels reduction is to reduce the potential fire behavior to better protect local communities from wildfires. Large, destructive wildfires have occurred in the past in and around the project area and conditions are favorable for future large wildfires.
- **Restore fire into fire adapted ecosystems.** The project area consists of vegetative types that have adapted to and require fire at various time intervals. Fire exclusion has occurred due to successful fire suppression and has changed the character of the vegetative types from historic trends. Pine barrens were created and maintained in the past through frequent wildfires that limited forest development. By allowing woody vegetation to encroach and succeed to forest, fire suppression has greatly reduced the quantity and quality of pine barrens in Oscoda County. The reintroduction of fire, via controlled burns, will help restore this rare community type.
Barrens are a natural non-forest vegetation type that historically covered up to 20% of the Huron National Forest. During the era of fire suppression and artificial pine plantations, most barrens were destroyed. Species dependent on barrens such as rough fescue (*Festuca altaica*) and Hill's thistle (*Cirsium hillii*) persisted along roadsides where there was enough sunlight. However, NNIS has degraded even this marginal habitat. Furthermore, some species like prairie dandelion (*Agoseris glauca*) and Canada milkvetch (*Astragalus canadensis*) have not been able to adapt to roadsides and have likely become scarce from the loss of barrens.
- **Produce timber products.** Red pine thinnings are needed to improve growth and yield of timber products. Trees that are low quality, unhealthy, or interfere with the growth of high quality trees would be removed. Periodic thinnings maintain the optimal basal area and allow for the development of high quality red pine sawtimber and veneer.
- **Maintain and improve wildlife habitat,** including opportunities for pine barrens creation for species viability needs. Wildlife species of concern associated with pine barrens include the secretive locust (*Appalachia arcana*), dusted skipper (*Atrytonopsis hianna*), eastern massasauga (*Sistrurus c. catenatus*), and prairie warbler (*Dendroica discolor*).
- **Identify and treat high priority NNIS infestations.** Roadsides in the project area are infested with spotted knapweed (*Centaurea stoebe*) and common St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). These species displace native plants and reduce biodiversity. Spotted knapweed in particular is known to release poisons from its roots and inhibit the growth of other plants around it.

Summary of Proposed Actions

1. Thin approximately 973 acres of red pine in approximately 22 areas to improve growth of remaining trees and reduce hazardous fuels.
2. Salvage and reforest approximately 20 acres of mixed conifer and hardwood along Deeter Road blown down during the tornado event in 2007.
3. Create and maintain approximately 522 acres of barrens in three areas through prescribed burning and/or mechanical or manual treatments.
4. Construct approximately 2 miles of temporary roads and associated landings to remove forest products. These roads and landings would be closed and rehabilitated when harvest activities are completed.
5. Reduce hazardous fuels and improve wildlife habitat by prescribed burning approximately 1,378 acres.
6. Create and maintain approximately 532 acres of fuelbreaks through timber harvest, mechanical or manual cutting, and prescribed burning.
7. Rehabilitate and reforest an old borrow pit located east of Camp 10 Road and just north of M-72 (T26N, R2E, SE ¼ of Section 17).
8. Control or eradicate non-native invasive plant species (NNIS) within the project area where necessary and appropriate. NNIS would be treated with herbicides, biological controls, mechanical and/or manual means.

Public Meeting

A public meeting regarding the Lost Creek Project will be held on Monday, December 15 2008 from 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM at the Big Creek Township Hall, 1175 West Ryno Road (M-72) in Mio, Michigan. Formal presentations will be offered at 4:00 PM and 6:00 PM and Forest Service staff will be available to answer questions from the public during the rest of the time period. Written statements will be accepted at this meeting.

Decision Process

At this time, a decision has not been made regarding this project. If you have information you feel the Forest Service may not be aware of, or if you would like to raise issues regarding potential effects of the Proposed Action, please submit these in writing to District Ranger Steven Goldman, USDA Forest Service, Mio Ranger Station, 107 McKinley Road, Mio, MI 48647-9314. Written comments may be hand delivered between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Comments may be faxed to (989) 826-6073, or emailed to comments-eastern-huron-manistee-mio@fs.fed.us. Written comments will also be accepted at the public meeting mentioned above. Please submit your comments by 30 days from the publication date of project notification in the Oscoda County Herald and include the following information:

1. Name, address, telephone number, organization represented and title (if appropriate);
2. Title of project for which comments are being submitted (Lost Creek Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project);

3. Specific facts and supporting reasons you believe should be considered in reaching a final decision.

Information received in response to this project notification will become a matter of public record¹. We will use significant issues that are identified through this process to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action.

Copies of the final HFRA EA will be distributed to people who request a copy of these documents. There will be a 30 day objection period after the publication of the final HFRA EA for this project. The Forest Service objection procedures for proposed hazardous fuel reduction projects authorized by the HFRA are found in 36 CFR part 218, which is available on the Internet at: http://www.fs.fed.us/objections/objections_related.php#app_work. If you have any questions, or need further information about this proposal, please contact Ralph Hartman at the Mio Ranger Station at 989-826-3252, extension 3325.

In addition, the Forest Service is willing to work with landowners to reduce hazardous fuels on private property adjacent to National Forest lands. In certain instances federal funding may be available to conduct those treatments. For more information on our *FIREWISE* program, call Paul Lyden at (989) 826-3252 ext. 3350 or visit their website at www.firewise.org.

Sincerely,

/s/ Steven A. Goldman

Steven A. Goldman
District Ranger

Enclosure- Project Area Map

¹ Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

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