



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Huron-Manistee National Forests
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Dear Interested Publics:

The Huron Shores Ranger Station of the Huron-Manistee National Forest is seeking your comments on the proposal to implement various fuels reduction projects. These projects are being proposed to reduce the fuel loading and subsequent fire danger from seven areas of concern on the Tawas and Harrisville Ranger Districts. The completion of these projects will improve on an already successful fuel break and will improve six other areas of concern in Iosco and Alcona Counties. Reducing the fuel loading on within these key jack pine and jack pine mix ecosystems can greatly reduce catastrophic damage should wildland fire occur. These projects are located in Iosco and Alcona Counties, Michigan (see attached maps and descriptions).

Background:

Historically, the forested lands of Iosco and Alcona counties have been susceptible to wildland fires. In 1911, most of the structures of Oscoda and Au Sable were destroyed when fire approached from the western jack pine "plains". Many wildfires have burned over the last 100 years as a result of the jack pine timber types associated with the sandy soils that are predominant in Iosco, Alcona and other central Michigan counties. Areas of sandy soil types are very susceptible to fire because rainfall quickly permeates through the sand and below the root systems of the many vegetative types that occur here. This inability to store and capture water causes early curing of plants and grasses, which can increase the intensity and spread of wildland fires. Recent drought has also created conditions that have resulted in fires larger than have normally occurred. Reductions in the Forest's budgets and reducing timber harvests have affected our ability to thin or complete treatments on stands to reduce the fuel loading.

The fire prone conditions of central Michigan and the potential for catastrophic fire occurrences are nationally recognized by fire management professionals, and will continue to be a management focus. In conjunction with the extreme fire conditions throughout the nation during the summer of 2000, Congress has increased budgets for the fuels reduction projects in fire-prone areas.

Purpose and Need for the Proposal:

The purpose of the proposal is to reduce fire hazards and to create defensible space near private and public improvements. Reducing the highly flammable fuels in these areas will reduce the wildland fire threat and provide a safer environment for firefighting suppression teams. Wildland fires in the vicinity of these improvements will be reduced to ground fires which are more easily suppressed. Hazardous fuels management is currently a major concern of Congress and has become top priority of the Forest Service nationwide. Loss of life and property throughout the United States has increased the scrutiny of fire management and the need to reduce these types of situations through aggressive fuels management.



Proposed Actions:

The Forest Service proposes to implement the following fuels reduction projects to: improve on existing fuel breaks near private property, enhance fire control efforts, improve site conditions during the implementation of future fire use projects, and increase firefighter safety where fuel loading would otherwise hamper suppression forces.

Specific Actions Include:

Project Area 1: [High School Additional](#). T23N, R9E, section 5. This project is being proposed to expand on the fuel breaks that were created in 1997 resulting from the Oscoda/Au Sable Fuel Reduction Project. This proved very successful during the following spring fire season. On May 18, 1998, a 100 acre wildland fire raced from an ignition point south of the Oscoda Area High School complex towards the Silver Sands Subdivision, adjacent to Grass Lake and River Roads. After the fire, the firebreak was deemed an immediate success. The fire burned through the crowns of the young jack pine but dropped down to the ground when it met the fuel break. This fuel break was credited with preventing almost sure structure loss from that fire. However, it was noted that even with the fuel break, intense heat from the fire adjacent to Grass Lake Road made structure protection very difficult. The potential fire intensity of the untreated fuels will increase further as these stands grow and mature. This proposed treatment will increase the width of the current 200 foot wide fuel break another 150 feet south of River Road and an additional 150 feet west of and along Grass Lake Road. The Grass Lake fuel break will then be extended down to Old US-23 on both sides of the existing road, to create a break for fires running north and east from ignitions in south half of section 5 and to create defensible space to east, should spotting occur across the road. The break created along Industrial Park and south of Silver Sands and McQuaig Park will also be extended to 500 feet from its existing 150-200 foot. This will increase the defensible space to the west of the Industrial Park and the private properties in the western half of section 4. The treatments would create further defensible space for the school, the subdivision and the Industrial Park complex. Approximately 110 acres would be treated in this project area. Where commercially feasible the projects will be carried out through timber sale operations. Non-commercial treatments may be necessary on much of the acreage due to small stem diameter and poor salability. Non-commercial treatments would be accomplished mechanically through the use of a hydro-axe. After treatment the entire project area will be maintained mechanically by mowing on a 3-5 year schedule. The proposal would also close existing two-tracks that have been created by illegal off-road vehicle use.

Project Area 2: [Eastgate Fuels](#). This project is adjacent to Project Area 1 and located north of River Road between Grass Lake Road and the Oscoda Area High School, in T24N, R9E, section 32, SE $\frac{1}{4}$. This would involve the pre-commercial removal of the immature jack pine around and adjacent to the Eastgate Welcome Center. Public use in this area increases the possibility of fire starts, especially in the early spring. Its adjacency to improvements north of River Road and the subdivisions makes this a critical fuel break area. The jack pine would be removed mechanically through a hydro-axe contract or by hand. Follow-up treatment to improve visual appearance and reduce ladder fuels would include slash treatment, pruning of any overstory red and white pine and the treatments of individual oak stump sprouts to improve the oak component. Approximately 15 acres would be treated.

Project Area 3: [Red Keg Additional](#). This project area is located in T25N, R5E, sections 4 & 5. This project involves the removal of jack pine/red pine fuels north of the Brodieville subdivisions in the Curtisville area. Approximately 90 acres of volatile fuels will be treated through a combination of a commercial timber sale, mechanically chopping or hand cutting. Larger oak, red and white pine as well as some aspen will be left for wildlife diversity and visual resource purposes. The area is adjacent to an existing 10 acre wildlife opening and the resulting 100 acres of open/semi-open habitat will be managed with prescribed fire on a regular interval to keep the area free from encroaching fuels and promote habitat for a variety of plants and animals dependent on this type of disturbance pattern.

Project Area 4: [Knuth Road Additional](#). This project area located within T23N, R8E, section 1, has also seen significant fire activity in recent years. More than 5 fires have occurred in the area between Grass Lake Road and Knuth Road within the last 4-5 years. This project is being designed to create an approximately 120 acre area of open/semi-open habitat similar to prairie ecosystems that once dominated the area. Maintaining the area in an open condition will provide a large area of less volatile fuels that can be utilized in suppression efforts of future wildfires. The 120 acre area will incorporate an existing 72 acre prairie restoration project, a previous wildland fire (the 30 acre Cooperation Fire of August 16, 1998) and stringers of jack pine regeneration that separate the two. Additional small “lobes” along the perimeter of the areas will be treated to make the area more efficient and safe for prescribed burns that will be used to maintain the area in an open condition. Approximately 18 acres would be treated through a mechanical treatment with a hydro-axe contract to create the 120 acre opening. An area wide trash cleanup will be instituted in conjunction with this project to eliminate potential fire start locations and improve the aesthetics of the area.

Project Area 5: [Sand Lake Fuels II](#). This project area is located to the south and west of Sand Lake and adjacent to Indian Lake and Old State Roads. The proposed action is to treat the forested stands adjacent to Indian Lake Road and south and west of the Grant Township fire hall property. All jack pine would be removed as well as most of the smaller diameter red pine for 350 to 400 feet immediately adjacent to the roads. The remaining portions of the stands would be harvested to a lower stem density, eliminating jack pine and discriminating against the volatile smaller diameter red pine species. Stands south of Old State Road would be treated similarly. Jack pine would be removed and the red pine would be thinned to reduce the flammability of the stands. Follow-up treatments may be necessary to prune the larger pine species to reduce ladder fuels and improve the visual quality of the stands. Where dense jack pine results in poor stocking, fill-in planting may also be necessary to create an open and park-like viewshed adjacent to the main road corridors. The entire treatment area would encompass about 220 acres. This area has had a number of fires that have been responded to in the last 4-5 years. The timber types in this area are a mixture of the jack pine component which is very susceptible to extreme burning conditions and has the potential to cause severe loss to private structures in this area. Although, response time is generally good the private homes and improvements are still quite susceptible to a quick moving fire. An associated project would close unnecessary roads in the area to eliminate unauthorized off-road use.

Project Area 6: [Westgate Fuels](#). The project area is located at the Westgate Welcome Center in Iosco County, T24N, R5E, section 24, SE ¼. The primary objective is to reduce the fuels in and around the Welcome Center. A secondary objective is to increase the visibility of the recreation site, as seen from River Road and M-65, to promote the safety of users, and reduce vandalism. Treatment acreage would be about 18 acres. Treatment of the area would be completed through the

thinning of the densely stocked small white, jack and red pine by hand cutting. Material cut will be treated by hand piling and burning the piles during periods of low fire danger or by chipping the material. In conjunction with the reduction of the density of the pine, the larger red and white pine and oaks would be pruned to reduce ladder fuels and to create a more open and park like condition

Project Area 7: [Pine River Fuel Break](#). This project area is located in T24N, R7E, sections 5 and 8; and T25N, R7E, section 32, Iosco County. This project proposes maintenance and additional work on an existing 310 acre shaded fuel break which will promote its effectiveness. The western edge of the existing break will be straightened, which will increase the efficiency of future prescribed burns utilized in maintenance. Two types of treatments are being proposed to accomplish the fuel break. The existing break area, which currently encompasses approximately 312 acres, will be thinned to reduce the spacing of the existing trees, removing all but the largest stems to create a sparsely stocked oak stand with a few super canopy red pine interspersed. The remaining trees would be very well spaced at about 50-75 feet apart. This treatment would be accomplished through timber harvesting, most likely a fuelwood sale. The second treatment would reduce the density of stems on approximately 40 acres of mixed jack pine/red pine and oak. The treatment acreage is scattered along the edge of the break and would straighten the completed fuel break perimeter thereby easing maintenance. Some interior roads would be closed after the harvesting was completed. Perimeter roads necessary to accomplish prescribed burning would be revegetated and left open for access to maintenance equipment. Approximately 352 acres would be treated in this project proposal area. The entire treatment area would be maintained through prescribed fire use every 3-5 years, and be maintained as an open, park-like savannah.

Let us Know

The Forest Service plans to ensure that issues concerning environmental protection, public health and safety, and cost effectiveness are incorporated into the planning and designing of these fuels projects. We would like to know your concerns and issues related to these projects so we can incorporate them into our project planning and design. Please submit your comments on or before November 2, 2001 to ensure that your issues may be addressed.

Sincerely,

/s/Nicholas T. Schmelter

[NICHOLAS T. SCHMELTER](#)

Public Services Team Leader

Enc. (Project Area Maps)