



File Code: 1950

Date: July 1, 2008

Subject: Scoping – Habitat Management Fire Hazard Reduction Ironton Ranger District

To: Interested Parties

The Ironton Ranger District of the Wayne National Forest is proposing to improve habitat and reduce fire hazard using one or more of the following methods; prescribed burning, thinning, and brush control of four separate areas in Lawrence County. Thinning and brush control may be accomplished using mechanical methods such as crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, girdling, and mowing. These actions will improve plant and animal habitat by reducing mid and understory competition and fire hazard.

The areas are:

Handley Branch located north of County Road 4, just west of Waterloo
(in T5N R17W, Section 26; 38° 42.50'N, 82° 30.35'W).

Fradd Hollow located south of County Road 5 approximately one mile south of Oakland
Chapel (in T3N R17W, Section 5; 38° 35.63'N, 82° 34.62'W).

Lake Vesuvius located east State Route 93 at the Lake Vesuvius recreation area (in T2N
R18W, Sections 23, 24, 26; 38° 36.37'N 82° 37.88').

Bluegrass located southeast of County Road 5 east of Five Forks (in T2N R17W, Section
28; 38° 37.18'N 82° 32.64'W).

During this initial public comment period called “scoping”, we are inviting you to send us your ideas and concerns or to let us know of any issues that you feel should be considered.

PURPOSE AND NEED

Fire historically maintained viable populations of several rare species, noted in the following paragraphs. However, since fire has been largely suppressed over the last 100 years many of the species are declining. Previous prescribed fires have begun to restore the sites and associated plant communities; however, intentionally frequent burning is required to restore the open understory and midstory structure required by the plants. Due to the narrow opportunities we have to burn under the strict weather parameters required mechanical treatments may be used to assist in reducing fire hazard. Mechanical treatments will be used to remove ladder fuels and reduce the midstory similar to what a fire would. Prescribed burning would be favored over mechanical treatments whenever appropriate conditions were met. Prescribing fire as frequent as every 2 – 3 years may be necessary initially to kill the sprouts of species such as maple (**Acer spp.**), spicebush (**Lindera spp.**), and green briar (*smilax spp.*) which tend to proliferate after a fire and if follow-up fires are not frequent enough.

Fradd Hollow and portions of both Handley Branch, and Bluegrass have been periodically prescribed burned in the last decade. The past burns have improved the habitat for fire dependent plant species and plant communities. If the periodic burning or other habitat management methods are not implemented it is likely that most of the fire dependent species will disappear.



The Handley Branch site is approximately 199 acres. Included are fields that have been converted to native warm season grasses and wooded uplands that are significant for an Oak Barren community (white oak-black oak). There are also three other rare species, including the endangered Sampson's snakeroot (*gentiana villosa* L), the state threatened balsam squaweed (*senecio pauperculus*), and the potentially threatened lesser ladies' -tresses (*spirathese ovali*). Not treating this area would result in the establishment and growth of woody species which over time would cause the loss of the prairie habitat and a decline in associated species. The area was last burned in March 2005.

The Fradd Hollow site is approximately 2 acres and is significant for a quality Oak Barren community and contains many prairie species, including 3 state listed rare species. It has a typical assemblage of overstory species such as post oak, Virginia pine and scarlet oak. The understory is comprised of species that thrive in fire maintained habitat such as the prairie grass Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Tall Tickseed (*Coreopsis tripteris*), and Greater Tickweed (*Coreopsis major*). Burning and mechanical treatments will perpetuate the open savanna habitat and may aid in re-establishing additional prairie species. Not managing this area would result in the establishment and growth of woody species which would overtime cause the loss of the prairie habitat and its associated species. This area was last burned in March 1997.

The Bluegrass site is approximately 1266 acres and is in an area where the February 2003 ice storm was fairly heavy causing many trees, limbs, and branches to fall to the ground thus increasing the possibility of intense wildfires that may be difficult to control. Additionally there are several rare, fire dependent species such as Carolina thistle (*cirsium carolinianum*), butternut (*juglans cinerea*), juniper sedge (*carex juniperorum*), and striped gentian (*gentiana villosa*) that are suppressed by woody vegetation from the lack of fire occurrence. Treating the area will reduce the heavy fuels caused by the ice storm and reduce competition for sensitive species.

The Lake Vesuvius site is approximately 730 acres and consists of the Lake Vesuvius recreation area. Within the Lake Vesuvius recreation area there are many rare and sensitive plant species that will benefit from the reintroduction of fire. These species are likely to be out competed by woody vegetation with the lack of vegetation treatment. Additionally, habitat management activities including restoring fire and mechanical treatments will enhance recreation opportunities by opening the under story potentially leading to better viewing of the area and reducing the possibility of wildfires. Mechanically treating the understory will also assist in removing woody vegetation and reduce the fire hazard.

The Land and Resource Management Plan (2006 Forest Plan) for the Wayne National Forest, provides guidance for the management of the lands and facilities of the National Forest.

The Goals include:

- 4.1 Sustain favorable terrestrial habitat conditions. Page 2-15.
- 5.2 Conserve Regional Forester Sensitive Species. Page 2-19.
- 6.1 Meet habitat needs. Page 2-25.
- 6.2 Improve fire regime condition class. Page 2-25.



7.1 Protect vegetation and wildlife from insects, diseases and wildfire. Page 2-29.

Forest Wide Goals and Objectives related to prescribed burning are stated on page 2-25:

Goal 6.2 Improve Fire Regime Condition Class

Reintroduce fire into fire-adapted ecosystems to conserve biodiversity and promote ecosystem structure and function closer to the historic range of variability.

Objective 6.2a – Use prescribed fire to conserve fire-adapted plant and animal biodiversity and to maintain and restore mixed oak and native pine ecosystems.

Objective 6.2b – Use prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to modify current fuel composition, and fire frequency, severity and pattern.

Objective 6.2c – Use prescribed fire and mechanical treatments to maintain a current fire regime condition class that represents the historic range of variability.

Currently the Handley Branch, Fradd Hollow and Bluegrass areas fall within the Special Areas Management Area of the Forest Plan. Management direction for the Special Areas Management Area states that: “All activities in these areas are to be consistent with the protection or maintenance of the unique characteristics for which an area was designated.” All three of these areas contain rare or sensitive species that are fire dependant species, therefore habitat improvement activities including prescribed burning and/or mechanical treatments would be consistent with the Forest Plan direction.

Currently the Lake Vesuvius area falls within the Developed Recreation Management Area of the Forest Plan. Management direction for the Developed Recreation Management Areas states that: “The landscape in and around these developed recreation areas varies from park-like to mature forests. ... Vegetation is primarily hardwood forest with a wide variety of native hardwood tree and shrub species.” Habitat improvement activities including prescribed burning and/or mechanical treatments would be consistent with maintaining the vegetative conditions described in the Forest Plan for this area.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Wayne National Forest proposes to conduct habitat improvement activities including prescribed burning and/or mechanical treatments controlled burning on the Ironton Ranger District in the areas of Lake Vesuvius, Bluegrass Ridge, Fradd Hollow, and Handley Branch. The overall purpose of these burns is to improve plant vigor, reduce natural fuel buildup, and to maintain the current Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) or move the FRCC progressively over the next ten years from a 3 to a 2. Burns may be conducted once every 2 to 3 years during the spring and/or fall fire seasons. Frequency will depend on the fuel conditions, the response of the rare and sensitive plants to the previous burns, and the rate at which progress is made from each burn in moving the FRCC from a 3 to a 2. Burning will be done within the parameters set forth



in the Prescribed Burn Plan for each area. See attached maps.

More detailed maps can be viewed or obtained by contacting Jonathan Olsen at the Ironton Ranger District, 6518 State Route 93; Pedro, Ohio 45659; 740-534-6500.

DECISION TO BE MADE

The Ironton District Ranger will be the deciding officer on this proposed project. The Ranger will decide whether to: implement the project as proposed; implement the project as it might be modified based on the issues raised and one of the alternatives developed and analyzed, or whether the project should not be implemented.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

We are interested in your comments on the proposed project. You are invited to provide initial public comments on the proposed 2008 Habitat Management and Fire Hazard Reduction Ironton Ranger District project. Please take a few minutes to review the information and provide comments about the proposed activity. Your comments will be used to identify relevant issues, generate alternatives and to guide the analysis. It is most helpful if your comments are within the scope of the purpose and need, are specific to the proposed action, and include supporting reasons for me to consider.

Please provide your comments by July 31, 2008, and when submitting comments be sure to include your name, current physical mailing address, and signature or other verification of identity. Please make your comments specific to this proposed action, addressing the proposed 2008 Habitat Management Fire Hazard Reduction Ironton Ranger District Project. Send comments to Ironton District Ranger at the above address, or submit comments electronically to **comments-eastern-wayne-ironton@fs.fed.us**. Copies of this scoping notice and additional information on areas being considered is available at **http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/wayne/projects/ironton_district/ironton_projects.html**, or are available in hard copy upon request.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and if denied, the Agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within five days.

If you have no comments at this time, but wish to remain on the mailing list for this project, please call or write to show your interest. Thank you for your interest in the Wayne National Forest.



This environmental analysis is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA guidelines (40 CFR Part 1500), and the Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction.

Thank you for your interest in the Wayne National Forest.



STEVE MARCHI
Acting District Ranger

attachment

