



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Ozark National Forest
Pleasant Hill
Ranger District

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Phone: 479-754-2864
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File Code: 1950

Date: May 12, 2014

The Pleasant Hill Ranger District/Ozark – St. Francis National Forests is proposing the Pleasant Hill Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project. We are inviting you to submit comments to help refine the proposed activities disclosed in this letter. In addition, the Responsible Official will prepare an environmental analysis of this proposal and needs your assistance to better identify issues, concerns, and opportunities. Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(a)(2), this proposed project implements the land management plan, and is subject to an objection process covered in §218 subparts A and B.

PROPOSED ACTION

The project area is located within the confines of the Pleasant Hill Ranger District. The project area encompasses various areas north of Clarksville, AR in Johnson, Franklin, Newton and Madison Counties (see attached map). The proposal is located on federal lands in an area bounded on the north by State Highway 16, on the west by State Highway 23, on the east by State Highway 123, Forest Service Road 1003, State Highway 21, and State Highway 16, and on the south by the Ozark National Forest boundary.

This proposal is designed to maintain or improve the plant and animal diversity to meet overall multiple-use objectives. In addition, this proposal is in conformance with the Ozark – St. Francis National Forests Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP) (USDA 2005).

Most work being proposed is on National Forest lands only. ***No work will occur on privately-owned land*** other than potential prescribed burning on private lands, with landowners consent. The Forest Service would solicit cooperation with private landowners via Wyden/Stevens agreements, which allow the Forest Service to carry out prescribed burn treatments on private lands surrounded by or adjacent to federal land.

Purpose and Need for This Initiative

The purpose of this initiative is to:

Restore ecosystem health and sustainable conditions in woodlands by reducing basal area and restoring the historic/natural fire regime.

Benefit/increase oak regeneration.

Restore ecosystem health and biodiversity on public lands containing non-native invasive plants (NNIS) through abatement of these species and recovery of native species.

Enhance plant and wildlife diversity in woodlands and through early seral habitat maintenance.

Improve habitat for Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) species

Provide improved recreation opportunities for the public.

Restore fire as a disturbance factor to fire adapted ecosystems.

Reduce hazardous forest fuel accumulations in order to protect forest ecosystems and private property that are at risk.

This action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the 2005 Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Land and Resources Management Plan (USDA 2005), and helps move the project area toward desired conditions described in that plan. This initiative is needed for the following reasons:

Ecosystem Restoration and Promoting Sustainable Ecosystems

The RLRMP states desired conditions for the vegetation communities found within the project area. Desired conditions for the Dry Oak Forest and Woodland include a sparse midstory and an understory supporting a diversity of herbaceous and woody species. Fire intolerant species, such as red maple, comprise a small component of species composition. Advanced oak regeneration is common in the understory. Desired conditions for the Shortleaf Pine-Oak Forest and Woodland include an overstory dominated by shortleaf pine, a sparse midstory and an understory characterized by a well-developed grass and herbaceous component. Abundance and influence of invasive non-native plants is low. Desired conditions for Rare and Special Communities (including glades, canebrakes and native grasslands) include exhibiting the composition, structure, and function necessary to support vigorous populations of species characteristic of the community. Prescribed burning and vegetation management are appropriate to restore these areas. Non-native invasive species are rare or absent and do not substantially affect community composition, structure, or function (USDA 2005).

The project area was historically subject to a more frequent regime of vegetation disturbance from anthropogenic (man-caused) fire. The project area contains fire history study sites in the Lower Atoka Hills and Mountains Land Type Association (LTA) in which frequent fire return intervals have been documented. Here, mean fire return interval for the period of 1680-1820 ranged from 4.6 to 16 years, for the period of 1821-1880 ranged from 2 to 3.1 years and for the period of 1881-1920 ranged from 1.4 to 5 years. From 1921-2000, mean fire return interval for these study sites ranged from 62-80 years (Guyette and Spetich 2003). Man caused fire is documented to have played a major role in shaping ecosystem structure in the Ozark Highlands. Documented presence of native people in the area prior to the earliest fire scars recorded in this study point to a fire regime with return intervals similar to those documented for the period of 1680-1920. Historically, the lands that are now the Ozark – St. Francis National Forests consisted of fire-dependent woodland and forest ecosystems with diverse herbaceous vegetation. Displacement of fire, creation of barriers to fire such as roads and a long standing policy of fire suppression has led to current forest health problems associated with abnormally dense forest conditions and unsustainable ecosystems.

The entire project area is within forest/grassland area described as Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) 2 and/or 3 and Fire Regime Group 1. Woodland restoration thinning coupled with prescribed burning would move the project area from FRCC 3 to FRCC 2 or FRCC 1. FRCC 1 is the most desirable fire regime condition class from an ecological perspective. Movement of ecosystems to FRCC 1 also assists in reducing wildfire intensity and spread, and related damage to private developments and resources on public lands. Existing ecological conditions in the project area include dense, overstocked forest, a shift

from the historic plant community composition toward fire intolerant plant species, lack of herbaceous species diversity and insect epidemics.

Non-commercial and/or commercial thinning and prescribed fire associated with the project would accomplish three objectives: first, it would reduce inter-tree competition and relieve the water stress on the remaining trees and help them repel diseases/pests; second, many trees that are cut would produce stump sprouts - a source of young oaks for the future; and third thinning and prescribed fire would allow for greater herbaceous diversity and conditions suitable for oak regeneration to thrive. Initiating a prescribed fire rotation mimicking historic (prior to 1920) fire return intervals following non-commercial thinning would maintain open forest conditions with reduced inter-tree competition and increased herbaceous diversity.

The Need for the Abatement of NNIS and Recovery of Native Species

Non-native invasive species (NNIS) are becoming more prevalent on the Pleasant Hill Ranger District, leading to displacement of native vegetation and decreased habitat quality for wildlife. NNIS plants have a number of biological characteristics which render them difficult to control using fire, hand control, or mechanical controls only. NNIS plants typically exhibit rapid growth rates, lack natural predators, are very good competitors, and produce abundant seed in early life stages. Most NNIS plants are perennials, with extensive tough runners or roots which readily re-sprout upon cutting. Integrated invasive plant management techniques utilizing a combination of fire, mechanical and chemical methods often are most effective. Implementation of a NNIS management strategy would reduce the spread of newly established NNIS populations and help the recovery of native species in areas of larger infestations.

The Need to Enhance Plant and Wildlife Diversity in Woodlands and Through Early Seral Habitat Maintenance

The Forests provide a wide variety of habitats that supports a diversity of wildlife species. One of the two most important is the early-successional habitat, (0-10 years old). Five of the Management Indicator Species (MIS) from the RLRMP are dependent upon early-successional habitat. Two MIS are dependent upon open forest conditions/woodlands.

These disturbance-dependent MIS species population trends have been analyzed utilizing a variety of sources. Population monitoring associated with these sources shows the status of these seven species as such:

- Deer populations are stable to increasing over the last two decades based on harvest data.
- Black bear populations are stable to increasing; however, to maintain quality habitat over time, there is a need to maintain early seral habitat as a habitat component.
- Northern bobwhite populations are decreasing due to a lack of pine/oak woodland and native grassland areas.
- Population trends for turkey are stable to declining. This is a result of poor brood recruitment for multiple consecutive years. However, in 2012 the AGFC annual turkey survey indicated an upward trend in turkey poults. In addition, downward trends in early-successional habitat would likely produce a negative effect on brood habitat in the future for turkey.
- Prairie warbler populations are decreasing primarily due to lack of young age-class forest (regenerating forest communities).
- Brown-headed nuthatches are dependent upon open pine forest and woodlands. Populations of this species are decreasing in the Arkansas – Central Highlands Region. Available habitat is a

limiting factor for this species.

- Red-headed woodpeckers are dependent upon open oak woodlands. Populations of this species are stable to decreasing. Available habitat is a limiting factor.

The Ozark National Forest is dominated by late successional habitat >70 years old. Forest communities are characterized by very low proportions of early successional habitat. The amount of early-successional habitat on the Forest is tied very closely to the amount of regeneration harvests the Forest conducts in a given year. This type of harvesting has remained a small percentage of the total timber harvest on the National Forest and this has driven the decline in early-successional habitat. The seven disturbance-dependent MIS shown above would benefit from woodland restoration, prescribed fire and maintenance of early seral habitat in wildlife openings. Forty-three species of disturbance-dependent birds which are declining throughout the central hardwoods area would also benefit from proposed vegetation treatments.

The Need to Improve Habitat for Region 8 Sensitive Species

The biological evaluation for this project identified nine Region 8 sensitive species and three threatened or endangered species known or suspected to be present in the project area which require open (unshaded) and/or fire dependent habitats, or would benefit from vegetation management. These species would benefit from implementation of the proposed projects.

The Need to Improve Recreational Opportunities

Use of public lands for wildlife related recreation is becoming increasingly important with population increases and development of private lands. Woodland areas containing greater herbaceous diversity and abundance provide improved wildlife habitat for several species of importance to the public – including white tailed deer, wild turkey, bobwhite quail, resident passerine birds and neo-tropical migratory birds. Early seral habitat provided in wildlife openings, and native warm season grass habitat help meet habitat requirements for these same wildlife species which are important to the public for recreation. Opportunities for sport fishing on the National Forest are of importance to the public. Implementation of the proposed projects would improve recreational opportunities for wildlife viewing, hunting and sport fishing on public lands.

The proposed action on the Pleasant Hill Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project is as follows:

Existing Wildlife Opening Maintenance:

Existing wildlife openings would be maintained district-wide on a rotational basis. The District currently manages 221 permanent wildlife openings, averaging 1.3 acres in size (see map). In addition, the District currently has 31 proposed wildlife openings, averaging 2 acres in size which have been approved under previous NEPA documentation. These 31 wildlife openings will be constructed within the next 5 years (see map). This proposal considers the long term maintenance of these 252 wildlife openings. Mowing would occur on a 1-2 year schedule. Disking, seeding native or non-invasive cool season forage plants, accompanied by application of fertilizer and lime would occur on a 2-3 year schedule. Application of approved herbicides such as glyphosate, imazapic, imazapyr, triclopyr, or hexazinone would occur on a 2-3 year schedule to reduce encroachment of woody species on a maximum of 250 acres annually. These openings would disperse concentrations of animal species over a broader area and would meet goals outlined in the Ozark – St. Francis National Forests RLRMP. Many animals need these forest openings to fulfill all or some of their habitat requirements during their life cycle. The Arkansas Game and Fish

Commission, local volunteers and the National Wild Turkey Federation will cooperate with the USDA Forest Service in wildlife opening maintenance.

Gate Installation:

Gates would be installed on wildlife opening access roads. Roads designated as open to the public would not be closed. Roads which provide access to private developments would not be closed. Gates at wildlife openings would improve wildlife habitat by reducing disturbance to wildlife from vehicles and provide better recreational experiences to Forest users by limiting areas to walk-in hunting/wildlife viewing only. Approximately 25 gates would be constructed under this proposal (see map).

Woodland Restoration:

This activity would occur on two geographic areas of the Pleasant Hill Ranger District on approximately 431 acres (Wolf Pen Glade and Barron – on map). Woodland restoration is also known as wildlife stand improvement (WSI) thinning. This project will occur incrementally over several years with approximately 100-300 acres occurring annually. This project would occur through the use of chainsaw felling, use of a tree shear, use of girdling and herbicide application. Foliar application of herbicide to treat stems less than 3 feet in height may be utilized also. If a commercial market becomes available for low quality hardwood, these areas may be commercially harvested. Currently, the areas designated for woodland restoration are characterized as low quality hardwood on dry sites that were historically maintained as open woodland by large fires. These areas currently contain approximately 70-90 overstory (large) trees per acre. Thinning would reduce the number of trees per acre to approximately 25-50 trees per acre. Woodland restoration thinning would result in an average basal area of approximately 30-50 square feet per acre in treated stands. Cut trees would be left in place on site, or would be utilized as fire wood, unless they are utilized as commercial forest products. Woodland restoration would allow more sunlight to reach the forest floor (thereby increasing herbaceous species diversity) and promote more mast (nut & fruit) production from the remaining trees. Woodland restoration would benefit a variety of game and non-game wildlife species. In association with prescribed fire, woodland restoration thinning would improve Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) from FRCC 2 or 3 to FRCC 1. All forest-wide standards and herbicide labels/precautions would be followed in the use of herbicide.

Existing Woodland Restoration Area Maintenance:

The Pleasant Hill Ranger District proposes to utilize foliar herbicide application and/or cut surface herbicide application to improve and maintain woodland conditions. This would occur within designated subunits within the Barron, Morgan Mountain, Indian Creek, Clear Creek, Sarah Hollow, Batson, Lynn Hollow, and Arbaugh Woodland Prescribed Burn Units. These subunits have been treated with non-commercial thinning previously to reduce canopy coverage and improve understory herbaceous species abundance and diversity (see map). Prescribed fire is the preferred method of reducing understory hardwood and cedar density in these areas. Herbicide application would be utilized when prescribed fire is not possible due to prescription/smoke issues, or when hardwood saplings are not top killed by prescribed fires. Twelve areas comprising approximately 2,667 acres may be treated with herbicide to maintain and improve woodland condition (see map). These areas may receive herbicide treatment if prescribed fire is not effective in reducing understory woody species. It is anticipated that herbicide use in these areas would range from 50-500 acres annually. Use of herbicide would benefit herbaceous understory diversity and abundance by reducing competition and shading by

woody species. This treatment would benefit a variety of game and non-game species which require open woodland habitat with diverse understory vegetation for all or a portion of their habitat needs. Approved herbicides such as glyphosate, imazapyr, or triclopyr would be used. All forest-wide standards and herbicide labels/precautions would be followed in the use of herbicide.

Non-native Invasive Species (NNIS):

NNIS (plants) abatement is proposed throughout the Pleasant Hill Ranger District with the use of approved herbicides such as glyphosate, imazapic, imazapyr, triclopyr, or hexazinone. This would entail the treatment of undesirable non-native invasive plants such as tall fescue, kudzu, sericea lespedeza, Japanese stiltgrass, Johnsongrass, tree of heaven, European privet and multiflora rose. Other NNIS plants which may be identified in the future would be treated in a similar manner. NNIS abatement would occur on a maximum of 600 acres annually district-wide. Following herbicide application, planting of native vegetation may occur if required. Abatement of NNIS would improve wildlife habitat for several mammal, bird and reptile species by reducing displacement of native vegetation by NNIS. All forest-wide standards and herbicide labels/precautions would be followed in the use of herbicide. For all projects involving herbicide use, prior to application of approved chemicals an "Implementation Checklist for Invasive Plant Control" would be completed by the District Wildlife Biologist or Forest Botanist (see Appendix A).

Maintenance of Restored Native Warm Season Grass Fields:

Approximately 289 acres of previously restored native warm season grass fields on the Pleasant Hill Ranger District would be maintained with prescribed fire, herbicide application and haying (see map). Maintenance would occur in the Woolsey, Yale, Mayo, Baker and Arbaugh fields. Approximately 145 acres would be burned annually to reduce woody species encroachment in these fields and improve warm season grasses. A maximum of 150 acres annually would be treated with approved herbicides to reduce woody species encroachment and NNIS (Johnsongrass, sericea lespedeza, etc.). Up to 289 acres may be hayed annually under special use permit or a stewardship agreement. Haying would also reduce woody species encroachment in the fields. Should the demand arise, these fields may be harvested for seed either by Forest Service personnel, or under special use permit or a stewardship agreement. All forest-wide standards and herbicide labels/precautions would be followed in the use of herbicide.

Restoration of Warm Season Grass in Acquired Fields:

Approximately 32 acres of acquired fields on the former Poole property would be converted from fescue and Bermuda grass and restored to native warm season species, or portions may be converted to cool season forage wildlife openings (see map). A mix of cool season forage and native warm season grasses and forbs is desired for this area, and separate fields would facilitate this. For conversion/restoration, prescribed fire followed by herbicide application would be used to reduce fescue and Bermuda grasses. Following this, fields would be planted with desired warm season species (such as big blue stem, little blue stem, Indian grass, switchgrass and forbs) and desired cool season species (such as Virginia wildrye, clover, winter wheat and annual rye grass). Seeding would be accomplished with a no-till drill, or through disking, broadcast seeding and rolling. Following establishment of warm season grasses these fields would be maintained under the same guidelines as described for previously restored native warm season grass fields. The cool season forage portions of these fields would be maintained under the same guidelines as described for wildlife opening maintenance. All forest-wide standards and herbicide labels/precautions would be followed in the use of herbicide.

Pond & Lake Management:

Structures to improve fish cover, spawning habitat and recreational fishing would be introduced into District ponds and Horsehead Lake (see map). Structures could include gravel, brush piles and pvc. Up to 40 structures would be constructed at District ponds/lakes annually. Fertilization of approximately 123 acres of District ponds and Horsehead Lake would occur annually. Fertilization would increase algae bloom and productivity of these recreational fishing areas. Liming of Horsehead Lake (98 ac.) would occur annually. Liming improves water pH and the effectiveness of fertilization. Control of dense aquatic vegetation such as watershield would improve ponds managed for recreational fishing. Herbicides approved for aquatic use would be utilized. Ponds with dense aquatic vegetation will be treated with herbicide only after efforts to use biological control methods have failed (grass carp). Twenty-eight ponds exist on the Pleasant Hill Ranger District which may receive these treatments. This activity would occur on a maximum of 15 pond acres annually. All forest-wide standards and herbicide labels/precautions would be followed in the use of herbicide.

Access Improvement to Acquired Poole Tract:

With the removal or modification of the low water, concrete bridge crossing the Mulberry River on the acquired Poole property, the Forest Service would require alternate access into this tract of land for facilitation of management. Access to this tract would be from the south side of the Mulberry River utilizing FDR 4432, FDR 94674A, and the termination of Johnson County Road 5241 on the Poole Tract. Approximately 3.2 miles of FDR 4432 and 0.8 miles of FDR 94674A would be maintained under normal Forest Service maintenance schedules to access this acquired tract. Approximately 0.4 miles of new road (using existing road templates where possible), would be constructed from the terminus of FDR 94674A into the Poole Tract. Road construction would occur in Township 12 North, Range 24 West, Section 29 NWNW and Section 20 SWSW. This section of road would be constructed to facilitate administrative access with high clearance vehicles and equipment necessary for maintenance of the Poole Tract fields. Approximately 0.4 miles of an existing section of 94674A would be decommissioned – where this existing section is located along a stream course. New road access would be constructed with drainage structures such as waterbars and culverts (as needed) to eliminate sedimentation in the watershed through road erosion. Vehicle access to the Poole Tract would be limited to administrative access only, through construction of a gate on FDR 94674A or FDR 4432 in Township 12 North, Range 24 West, Section 29 NENW, NWNE, or NENE.

Prescribed Burning:

The Pleasant Hill Ranger District proposes the use of management ignited prescribed fire on approximately 108,940 acres in fourteen areas district-wide (see map). Of this total acreage, approximately 89,977 acres are public lands administered by the USDA Forest Service, and approximately 18,873 acres are private lands. The U.S. Forest Service and The Arkansas Forestry Commission will solicit cooperation with private landowners through the use of Stevens (State) and Wyden (Federal) agreements, which would allow the agencies to carry out prescribed fire treatments on private lands surrounded by or adjacent to public lands under federal management. If private land owners do not wish to participate in prescribed fire treatments their lands will be excluded from the project.

Individual burn units will be treated with prescribed fire on an approximate 3-6 year rotation. Not all burn units will be burned in the same year, but would be burned incrementally over a multiple year period.

Table 1: Proposed Prescribed Fire in Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project

Project Area	Approximate Acres	7.5 Minute Quad.
Arbaugh Fields/Woodland	240 federal	Oark
	0 private*	
Subtotal	240 acres	
Barron – Redding Road	2,860 federal	Cass
	5 private*	
Subtotal	2,865 acres	
Batson – Horsehead/Sinclair Hollow	7,274 federal	Hunt & Harmony
	2,831 private*	
Subtotal	10,105 acres	
Catalpa	7,871 federal	Oark & Ozone
	1,226 private*	
Subtotal	9,097 acres	
Chinquapin	2,043 federal	Harmony & Hunt
	2,880 private*	
Subtotal	4,923 acres	
Clear Creek	7,177 federal	Yale
	2,934 private*	
Subtotal	10,111 acres	
Indian Creek	19,551 federal	Yale & Pettigrew
	1,336 private*	
Subtotal	20,887 acres	
Little Piney Watershed	11,529 federal	Ozone & Rosetta

	1,421 private*	
Subtotal	12,950 acres	
Lynn Hollow	3,748 federal	Boston
	571 private*	
Subtotal	4,319 acres	
Morgan Mountain	6,972 federal	Cass
	937 private*	
Subtotal	7,909 acres	
Sally Ann Hollow	5,993 federal	Hagarville & Rosetta
	1,627 private*	
Subtotal	7,620 acres	
Sarah Hollow	6,987 federal	Yale & Oark
	1,243 private*	
Subtotal	8,320 acres	
Wolf Pen Glade	1,932 federal	Yale & Oark
	5 private*	
Subtotal	1,937 acres	
Woods Mountain	5,800 federal	Ludwig & Hagarville
	1,857 private*	
Subtotal	7,657 acres	
TOTAL	108,940 acres	

*Prescribed Fire-Private Lands – pending landowner approval through Wyden and Stevens Agreements only.

The primary goals of the prescribed component of this project is to reduce fuel accumulation in order to better protect National Forest and adjacent private lands from wildfire, and to reintroduce fire as a disturbance factor into fire adapted ecosystems. Implementation of prescribed fire would improve Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) from FRCC 3 to FRCC 2 or 1. Prescribed fire would also promote oak regeneration in canopy openings created by red oak borer damage/oak decline, promote oak regeneration, maintain pine/hardwood stands in open conditions, increase herbaceous understory

species density and diversity, maintain/restore glades, improve habitat conditions for fire-dependent special-status plants, increase soft-mast production, reduce potentially hazardous accumulations of fuels on the forest floor, and improve wildlife habitat conditions.

Smoke emission modelling would be completed as part of the project analysis. Prescribed burning would be conducted in compliance with Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) voluntary smoke management guidelines.

Silvicultural Practices on Acquired Lands (Poole Tract):

The recently acquired Poole Tract comprises approximately 180 acres (see map). In addition to fields, this tract contains approximately 150 acres of hardwood and pine forest vegetation. There have been varying levels of past timber harvest on this tract by the previous landowner. Silvicultural practices which may be implemented on this acquired land include: hardwood release, hardwood planting and release, hardwood pre-commercial thinning, hardwood timber stand improvement, pine release, pine planting and release, pine pre-commercial thinning, pine timber stand improvement and pine site preparation, pine planting and pine release. These practices would be accomplished with the use of handtools, herbicide and mechanical means.

Removal of Structures on Acquired Lands (Poole Tract):

The Poole tract acquisition contains old structures including a house, barn, and additional outbuildings. Some of these structures present a safety hazard on public lands and are a liability to the Forest Service due to their condition and remote location. Structures deemed unsafe or unneeded would be dismantled. However, before buildings can be dismantled the Forest Service Zone Archaeologist is required to complete structural documentation forms on all structures older than 50 years, and submit these to the State Historic Preservation Office for concurrence.

HOW TO COMMENT

Specific written comments as defined by §218.2 should be within the scope of the Proposed Action, have a direct relationship to the Proposed Action, and must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. To establish standing for objection eligibility, the designated **period for receiving scoping comments** is from **May 15, 2014 to June 14, 2014**. Those who do not respond to scoping will not receive project updates.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on these proposed actions and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, submission of anonymous comments will not allow the agency the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents. A 30-day Notice and Comment period will be provided at a future date (§218.24).

Specific **written comments** must be submitted to: **Patricia Kowalewycz, District Ranger, 2591 Highway 21, Clarksville, AR 72830 – 479-754-2864, 479-754-3017 (FAX)**. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text

(.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx) to comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-pleasanthill@fs.fed.us

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7. For objection eligibility (§218.5), only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection. Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

Please state "Pleasant Hill Wildlife Habitat Improvement" in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

Additional information on the Pleasant Hill Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project is also available on the webpage: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/osfnf/>. If you would like more information or have questions relating to this proposal, please contact **Greg Taylor, Pleasant Hill Ranger District – Wildlife Biologist**, by email (gregorytaylor@fs.fed.us) or by phone (479-754-2864 ext. 2869).

Sincerely,



/s/Patricia Kowalewycz
PATRICIA KOWALEWYCZ
District Ranger

Enclosures:

- Appendix A (Implementation Checklist for Invasive Plant Control)
- Appendix B (Mitigation Measures for Herbicide Use)
- Project Area Maps

References

Guyette, R.P., and M.A. Spetich. 2003. Fire history of oak-pine forests in the Lower Boston Mountains, Arkansas, USA. *Forest Ecology and Management*. 6195 (2003) 1-12.

USDA Forest Service. 2005. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Ozark-St. Francis National Forest. Record of Decision, 23 September 2005.

USDA Forest Service. 2005. Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Ozark-St. Francis National Forest. Record of Decision, 23 September 2005.

Appendix A
Implementation Checklist for Invasive Plant Control

The following implementation checklist will be completed prior to the implementation of any projects associated with the proposed action.

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES CONTROL

C Comp/St.	N NNIS Species :	A Approx. Patch Size:
Habitat:		
C Coordination w/Private Landowner Needed? Yes / No		

Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive Species Habitat

Does high quality habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive plants or amphibians occur in the area proposed for treatment? Has the site been surveyed for Threatened, endangered or sensitive (TES) plants or amphibians? If TES plants or animals occur or potentially occur in the project area, describe how this project has been mitigated.

Soil, Water and Aquatic Habitat

Does aquatic or riparian habitat occur in the area proposed for treatment? Is a herbicide labeled for use in wetlands being applied? Is other mitigation needed? If so, please state.

This project area has been reviewed to ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of the Decision Notice for the Pleasant Hill Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project which covers project activities.

WildlifeBiologist/Botanist: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Mitigation Measures for Herbicide Use – Pleasant Hill Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project

Herbicide treatments would follow product label instructions regulating use, including application methods to minimize drift and contamination to non-target species. All herbicide treatments would follow standards included in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, pages 3-4 through 3-5 (USDA Forest Service 2005). Mitigation associated with herbicide use includes the following:

1. Complete an implementation checklist for all projects prior to implementation of any activity associated with herbicide application, to insure that appropriate mitigation measures and treatments are applied for infestations as they are identified.
2. Require that contractors or workers (Forest Service personnel) conducting control activities maintain the materials and information needed to implement a spill contingency plan.
3. Ensure that only formulations of herbicides approved for aquatic use, would be applied within riparian corridors.
4. Use only soil inactive herbicides in proximity of (less than 60 feet from) TES species.
5. Use herbicide application methods within 60 feet from TES locations and 10 feet from perennial and intermittent streams within watersheds occupied by aquatic TES that favor those methods which minimize or eliminate drift, including cut stump application, or direct foliar application using a wicking technique. Any TES plant may be temporarily covered with material impenetrable to herbicide, as needed.
6. Plan and implement erosion control measures as needed, if removal of non-native invasive plants results in soil exposure and the possibility for erosion.
7. Implement project-level monitoring to ensure long-term effectiveness of treatments and the need for rehabilitation or restoration of sites following removal.
8. Require that contractors or workers (Forest Service personnel) conducting control activities transport mix water and water for washing into the field.
9. Prohibit trucks containing herbicide or tank mixed herbicide from parking, mixing, or distributing herbicides within 200 feet of a perennial or intermittent stream, surface water, or pond.
10. Ensure that herbicide mixing, loading, or cleaning areas in the field are not located within 300 feet of private lands, open water or wells, or other sensitive areas.
11. Conduct risk assessments or utilize existing risk assessments (USDA Forest Service 2003) to measure and mitigate exposure risks for humans and wildlife.