



File Code: 1950
Date: September 17, 2014

Dear Friends:

We are starting environmental analysis for the *St. Francis Range Allotment Management Project*. I welcome your comments as they could assist me to better identify issues, concerns, and opportunities related to our proposal.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(a)(2), this proposed project implements the land management plan and is subject to §218 subparts A and B.

Where are we proposing to work?

The project area consists of six (6) separate range allotments totaling approximately 681 acres as listed below and shown on the attached map. All six range allotments are located in Lee County, AR. Neither private lands nor the rights of private land owners will be affected by this project.

Proposed Project Areas for the St. Francis Range Allotment Management Project

Allotment	National Forest System Acres/ Allotment*	Located within
Ranger #1	117	T. 2N, R. 4E, Section 30
Hattie #2	105	T. 2N, R. 4E, Sections 30 and 31
Summer Home #3	115	T. 1N, R. 4E, Sections 6 and 31
Bear Creek #4	44	T. 1N, R. 4E, Section 9
Taylor #5	260	T. 2N, R. 4E, Sections 29 and 32
Mulehead #8	40	T. 1N, R. 4E, Section 32
Total Acres	681	

**Acres shown are rounded to the nearest whole number.*

Why are we proposing this project?

The need for this project is based on the difference between the desired and current allotment conditions (summarized below) and led to the development of a proposed action that will

- maintain the Forest’s range allotment pastures in an open condition;
- improve forage quality;
- promote native river cane and other native grass species;
- reduce non-native invasive plant infestations, and



- maintain soil productivity.

Desired Conditions

The desired conditions for range as defined by the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, page 1-48) are:

- Permanent pastures provide optimal forage for wildlife species that benefit from early successional conditions or a mixture of habitat conditions, and
- Livestock grazing occurs on some of the pastures to help maintain desired conditions.

Pastures are assigned to Management Area 3.J.: *Pastures and Large Wildlife Openings*. The desired condition for pastures, defined by the Forest Plan on pages 2-76 and 2-77 are:

- pastures are maintained in a grass/forb condition with little woody encroachment;
- exotic, improved pasture (Bermuda and fescue) is converted to native grasses;
- soil productivity is maintained and optimum forage is provided;
- invasive species and species of poor forage quality are reduced;
- grazing does not negatively impact soil, riparian areas, stream banks or channels.

Current Conditions

Under previously approved management decisions the range allotments received treatments to help keep the pastures in an open habitat condition, but the level and types of treatments approved have not been sufficient to achieve desired conditions.

Each allotment is comprised of mixed Bermuda and fescue pastures with some native grasses and forbs and occasional inclusions of pine or mixed hardwood. Non-native invasive plant species, woody encroachment and erosion caused by feral hog damage are present on all six allotments. Dams on some of the ponds used by grazing cattle have failed.

Native river cane is present on some of the District's range allotments, but it does not occur in quantities that are thick or extensive enough to benefit the wildlife species that need this habitat type to thrive. The Forest Plan provides direction to restore and maintain rare and special communities such as canebrakes (Forest Plan pages 1-35 and 1-37) and to reestablish native cane species along streams and rivers during native grass restoration activities (Forest Wide Standard FW77, Forest Plan page 3-11).

What are we proposing?

The Proposed Action is designed to comply with all federal, state and local laws, regulations or requirements and the standards of the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan and its associated documents are posted on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/osfnf/landmanagement/planning> .

Management plans outlining actions needed to move each allotment toward desired conditions are being developed. Based on annual inspection findings and management plan objectives,

treatments that may include any or all of the management actions listed below will be prescribed and implemented. If the Proposed Action is selected it will be implemented over a period of 10 years.

- issuing term grazing permits;
- issuing term permits for cultivation, cutting and removal of hay;
- mowing and/or brush-hogging;
- discing, blading;
- seeding warm or cool season grasses;
- cultivating/transplanting native river cane;
- fertilizing and liming as needed based on soil testing;
- prescribed burning;
- maintaining, repairing, removing or constructing fencing;
- maintaining or reconstructing ponds;
- decommissioning or obliterating ponds that repeatedly fail to hold water;
- installation of a reliable water source such as a well with a float, when a pond repeatedly fails on grazing use areas;
- fencing out ponds that can be maintained and installing gravity fed water sources;
- repairing areas where erosion is occurring;
- repairing damage caused by feral hogs, pack animals or motorized vehicles;
- applying herbicides to control invasive plants (native and non-native invasive species) competing with optimum forage species, to remove encroachment of woody stems, or to control aquatic vegetation in ponds if the vegetation is adversely affecting water quality.
 - The herbicides proposed for use are limited to glyphosate, triclopyr (amine and ester formulations) or imazapyr with a citrus based surfactant or a vegetable oil carrier to increase application efficacy.
 - Herbicide used to treat aquatic vegetation in ponds will be limited to a commercial formulation of glyphosate that is labeled for aquatic use.
 - Herbicide used to treat terrestrial vegetation on pond dams will be limited to commercial formulations of glyphosate or triclopyr amine labeled for aquatic use.
 - Herbicides, citrus based surfactant and/or vegetable oil based carrier will be administered at the lowest effective rate and according to the manufacturer's label specifications.
 - Characteristics of the herbicides proposed for use are discussed at length in their respective risk assessments which are available on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/pesticide/risk.shtml:
 - Application methods may include cut surface, foliar spray or basal bark.
 - Herbicides will not be applied directly to soil.

- All phases of herbicide use will be monitored to ensure the proper mixing, application and clean-up procedures are followed, and to determine the efficacy of applications.

Alternatives Currently Being Considered

The only alternative to the Proposed Action currently being considered is the No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative previously approved management activities will continue but no new activities be implemented.

Establishing Standing for Objection Eligibility

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7 [<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-08-08/html/2012-19302.htm>].

While comments will be accepted any time throughout the process, to establish standing for objection eligibility you must provide specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public comment. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, but will not give you objection rights.

This designated opportunity for public comment is between September 19, 2014 and October 19, 2014. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. Another designated opportunity for public comment will be provided at a future date (§218.24).

Issues 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)].

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 me, as the Responsible Official, to consider. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. To receive future updates on this project, you must respond to this solicitation and provide contact information.

Your written comments must be submitted to me either by mail at the address provided in the letter head, in person at the District Office or electronically. Please state “St. Francis Range Allotment Management” in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail. For those submitting hand-delivered comments, our District Office is located inside the Mississippi River State Park Visitor Information Center; our office hours 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@fs.fed.us .

For Additional Information

If you want additional information or have any questions, please contact me at (870) 295-5278 or

District Wildlife Biologist Jessica Hawkins at (870) 269-3228.

Thank you for your interest in the management of the St. Francis National Forest.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mary Maercklein

MARY MAERCKLEIN
Sylamore-St. Francis District Deputy Ranger

jlf
Attachment (1 vicinity map)

St. Francis National Forest Range Allotment Management

-  Range Allotment
-  Roads
-  Forest Service
-  Mississippi River State Park

