



File Code: 1950

Date: September 30, 2015

Dear Interested Public:

As we wrap up the second year of implementing the Indiana Bat Habitat Restoration Project, I wanted to let you know how we are progressing.

With the help of great partners and through contracted work, we've gotten quite a bit done this year. Last year, I told you that we planned to implement timber stand improvement treatments with herbicide; however, they have not been done because the contractor awarded that work has not fulfilled the contractual duties. It is anticipated that a new vegetation management contract will be executed in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17).

For the vicinities of the various treatments implemented in FY15 and those planned for FY16 described below, please see the attached Compartment map.

Prescribed burning and associated activities:

Days within prescription for burning were limited over the past year. We did, however, complete 2 burns totaling 3,502 acres within Compartments 25, 35, 77, 78 and 79. The burns were completed using existing roads and natural features as containment line. Mechanical treatments to modify fuel structure were completed on 20 acres at the Sugarloaf Tower site in Compartment 21.

In FY16, we plan to burn approximately 10,938 total acres within the project area within Compartments 14, 21, 29, 34, 41, 74, 75, 85, 89 and 91. We also plan to conduct mechanical treatments on approximately 200 acres.

Needs for mechanically constructed prescribed fire containment line in FY16 are currently being examined.

Silviculture treatments:

In FY15 timber sales totaling 2,066 acres were offered and sold within Compartments 51, 53, 54, 58, 59 and 99; of these, 431 acres were regeneration harvests. Approximately 1% of the forested acres within the project area are in the 0-10 year age class.

Timber purchasers will conduct maintenance on approximately 12.9 total miles of roads that will be used for hauling: 1187A (1.0 mile), 1167 (0.6 mile), 91059A (0.2 mile), 91059E (1.3 miles), 91059F (0.4 mile), 91051A (1.3 miles), 91051B (0.6 mile), 91051D (0.4 mile), 91051E (0.8 mile), 91051F (0.3 mile), 91051G (0.3 mile), 91098D (1.6 miles), 1131A (1.7 miles), 91058A (0.9 mile), 91058O (0.3 mile), 91058R (0.5 mile), 91058S (0.7 mile). No road reconstruction was done to facilitate hauling timber this year.



In FY16, we plan to offer timber sales totaling 1,556 acres (of which 340 acres will be regeneration harvests) within Compartments 54, 91 and 52. As additional inventories and prescriptions are completed, the number of acres offered for sale will likely increase.

Timber stand improvement treatments with saws were completed on 505 total acres within Compartments 20, 37, 54, 55, 73 and 88. No herbicide was applied for timber stand improvement purposes in FY15. Next year, we plan to do timber stand improvements with saws on 1,561 total acres located within Compartments 20, 21, 27, 37, 45, 61, 73-75, 94, 99 and 100, but no herbicide applications for timber stand improvement purposes are currently planned.

No site preparation or reforestation activities were implemented in FY15, but for FY16, we do anticipate conducting site preparation with herbicide treatments on 121 acres in Compartment 37.

Regeneration surveys show an 80% stocking rate in naturally regenerated stands. Because no reforestation was done last year, no plantation survival surveys were done.

Wildlife Stand Improvement (WSI) Treatments

Mechanical WSI treatments to improve foraging habitat for the Indiana bat were completed on 250 acres in Compartment 29. No herbicide treatments for wildlife stand improvement purposes were implemented in FY15. At present, we plan to treat another 275 acres in FY16.

Non-native Invasive Plant Treatments

Surveys show non-native invasive plant treatments implemented in FY14 were 80% effective at achieving desired outcomes.

In FY15, non-native invasive plant infestations found on 690 acres within Compartments 13, 14, 36, 37, 45, 54, 55, 81, 88, 89, 93, 94 and 100 were treated with herbicide. The majority (550 acres) of these treatments were done along roadsides. We plan to treat 650 acres in FY16.

Per the protocol outlined in the *Ozark-St. Francis National Forests' Herbicide Monitoring Plan for Water Quality*, water samples were collected from streams near herbicide application units for non-native invasive plant treatments. The samples were submitted for analysis, but we have not yet received the results from the laboratory.

Gating Hibernacula

We awarded a contract to construct a cave gate on one Indiana bat hibernaculum. The gate's design was developed collaboratively with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the AR Game and Fish Commission, and pre-installation data has been collected. Post -installation surveys for the two gates installed last year show no changes from pre-installation conditions.

Canopy Closure

No data regarding the effects of activities on canopy closure is available to report for FY15. Baseline canopy closure data is being collected in Compartment 102 (the Sylamore Experimental Forest) for the side-by-side implementation of Alternatives 2 and 3. Stand delineation and inventories are complete and prescriptions are currently being written. Layout and marking will follow when prescription work is completed. We anticipate marking could be completed as soon as next spring.

Mist netting surveys

Mist netting surveys were conducted to determine presence or probable absence of Indiana bats outside the hibernating season where actions involving tree cutting or burning are prescribed. This summer, 68 sites were netted, and 5 male Indiana bats were captured. Per USFWS direction, cutting and prescribed burning activities will be restricted to the hibernating season for two years within a 0.6 mile radius of each capture site.

We are waiting on data from the mist netting contractor to determine how many acres will be cleared for cutting and burning outside the hibernation period for FY16 and for data on any newly identified roost tree locations.

If you have questions

I am always happy to speak with those interested or concerned about management of the Sylamore Ranger District. If you have any questions or want more information on this project or any of the work we do, please give me a call at (870) 214-0934 or send me an e-mail at jrmccoy@fs.fed.us .

Sincerely,
/s/ Jim McCoy

JIM MCCOY
District Ranger