

Decision Notice  
& Finding of No Significant Impact  
**Offner Bridge Replacement and Streambank Stabilization**

**USDA Forest Service**  
**Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie**  
**Will County, IL**  
Sec 31, T34N, R11E and Sec 6, T33N, R11E

## **Background**

The Midewin NTP was established in 1996 as the first national tallgrass prairie in the United States under the Illinois Land Conservation Act (ILCA) of 1995. On March 10, 1997, the Department of Defense (Army) transferred the first 15, 080 acres of the former arsenal lands to the USDA Forest Service. The transfer included both land and infrastructure the Army used during the operation of the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant. Many of the facilities and buildings inherited from the Army are in poor condition and pose safety concerns for both public and administrative use.

The existing bridge on Offner Road (Road 1 North) in the northeastern part of Midewin is a concrete bridge approximately 29 feet in length. The bridge has chipped concrete and exposed rebar on the underside of the deck, which has reduced the load rating for the bridge to 3 tons. Additionally, scour at the upstream side of the west abutment has eroded behind the existing wing wall, threatening the integrity of the gravel roadbed. This segment of Offner Road (Road 1 North) is a long-term administrative road in the Midewin Prairie Plan (see figure 6 in the Prairie Plan) and is necessary to maintain motor vehicle access to the Klingler Cemetery.

Several areas along the streambank, both above and below the bridge, including the west bank immediately under the bridge has severe erosion.

## **Decision**

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2. This alternative authorizes the replacement of the Offner Bridge located on Road 1 North and the stabilization of up to (7) erosional areas along the streambanks within a quarter mile, both upstream and downstream, of the bridge site.

The bridge will be replaced by a single-span timber bridge approximately 40 feet in length. The abutments to the new bridge shall remain consistent with the existing road centerline. The abutment walls below the bridge deck will be aligned to more closely follow the natural centerline of the stream. The bridge shall have a clear roadway width of no less than 14 feet. The increase in length will allow the new concrete abutments to be constructed outside of the existing stream channel, reducing sedimentation during the phase of construction. The old abutments will be removed and rip-rap will be placed to protect the new abutment from scour. The streambank located immediately upstream of the west abutment will also be repaired and armored with rip-rap to prevent future erosion. The other six erosional areas will have the existing steep banks pulled back to approximately 3:1 slopes, and then they will be covered in geotextile material and planted with appropriate vegetation.

Mitigation measures were developed to ease some of the potential impacts the action alternative may cause. The following mitigation measures will be applied:

- If construction starts during April 15-August 15 interval, first survey the project area for nesting birds before construction begins. If any nests are found, avoid disturbance until after nestlings fledge.
- Restrict construction activities to within 200' north of Offner Road and 200' south of Offner Road. Use temporary construction fencing if necessary to prevent trespass by vehicles and equipment into grassland habitat.
- Clean equipment before arriving and after leaving Midewin.
- Use weed-free materials if possible, including soil, fill, gravel, and erosion control materials.
- Follow best management practices (BMPs) for all in-stream work and bank-stabilization, reducing sedimentation to downstream stretches of Prairie Creek.
- Stabilize channel banks with using an appropriate mixture of seed and/or plant materials. This will not only stabilize the banks, but also provide competition to exclude invasive plants. Because the Offner Bridge location is surrounded by non-native vegetation, use of certain widespread, non-native grasses (redtop, smooth brome, perennial ryegrass) is recommended. If using willows to stabilize banks, then use material (fascicles, cuttings) from the aggressive native sandbar willow, which is widespread and common on Midewin.
- Adhere to additional mitigation measure set forth by the Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit mitigation measures.

## **Decision Rationale**

The Offner Bridge and this segment of Road 1 North is identified in the Prairie Plan as a long-term administrative road. Presently, this road and bridge is frequently used by the public, permittees, family members of the Klingler cemetery group, and for administrative uses. Providing and maintaining a road that is safe and efficient for public and administrative use is a priority set forth in the Prairie Plan. Additionally, repairing the severe erosion damage underneath the bridge and in other areas along the streambank will be integral to maintaining the condition of the bridge, after replacement, for long-term use.

This decision is based on a review of the project record that shows consideration of relevant scientific information, including responsible opposing views, and as appropriate, the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, and risk. My decision implements the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Plan and as required by NFMA Section 1604(i), I find this project to be consistent with the Plan. The replacement of Offner Bridge and stabilizing up to (7) erosional areas along the creek meets the goals and objectives outlined on page 2-12 of the Plan.

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered one other alternative. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on page 13-14.

### **Alternative 1 -- No Action**

Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No bridge replacement or erosional controls would be implemented to accomplish project goals.

This alternative was not selected because it does not meet the goals and objectives of the

Prairie Plan as this road is identified in the Prairie Plan as a long-term administrative road.

## **Public Involvement**

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) for the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie beginning in April 2009 and has continued to be listed in the quarterly SOPA, up to the most recent in January 2010. The proposal was also provided to a total of 151 individuals, private companies, tribal contacts, and other public agencies for comment during scoping, on March 6, 2009. A public notice was published in the Joliet Daily Herald on March 10, 2009. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency consulted the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Tribal Councils, and the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. Impacts may be both beneficial in the long term and adverse in the short term. Effects may exist even if the Federal agency believes that, on balance, the effect will be beneficial. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because the authorized action is to improve public health and safety. As the bridge is being repaired, the road will be closed temporarily and regular users will be directed to an alternative route (EA, page 24).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. Stabilizing the streambanks adjacent to the bridge by returning them to a more natural appearing condition will move the area towards a desirable Scenic Integrity level (EA, page 25).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. There is no known scientific controversy over the impacts of the project. Public safety is a high priority at Midewin and is evaluated in the EA (EA, page 24).
5. Removal of Offner Bridge and stabilizing will eliminate a risk MidewinNTP would be taking if the bridge was left in its current state to continue to degrade. There are no unique or unknown risks anticipated with the implementation of this project. (EA, pages 9-25).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. (EA, pages 4-21). Mitigation measures (EA, page 7) developed for this project are in place to minimize effects as implementation occurs.
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant. The environmental assessment describes the effects for this project in detail. Overall, the impacts are positive and with consideration of past, present and foreseeable future actions will not have a significant cumulative impact from both direct and indirect effects. (EA, pages 4-25).

8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The SHPO determined that no significant historic, architectural, and archeological resources are located in the project area, as a result, the Offner Bridge was deemed "Not Eligible" for historical properties (EA, page 22).
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973, because there are no listed species that occur within the project area (EA, page 18). The finding of no adverse affect from the USFWS is available in the project file for review upon request.
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The action is consistent with the Midewin Land and Resource Management Plan.

### **Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations**

This decision to implement Alternative 2 is consistent with the intent of the Prairie Plan's long-term goals and objectives listed on page 2-12. The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines, which state "provide and maintain safe, efficient, and aesthetically appropriate facilities at Midewin NTP." (Prairie Plan, pages 2-12).

### **Implementation Date**

This project may be implemented immediately.

### **Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is not subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. 5, "projects or activities for which notice of the proposed action and opportunity to comment is published and no substantive comments expressing concern or only supportive comments are received during the comment period for a proposed action analyzed."

### **Contact**

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Mary Honer, NEPA Planner, via e-mail at [mhoner@fs.fed.us](mailto:mhoner@fs.fed.us), by phone at 815-423-6370, or in-person at 30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington, IL 60481.

*/s/ Wade A. Spang*

*2/2/2010*

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Wade A. Spang  
 Prairie Supervisor  
 Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date