



**File Code:** 1950-1

**Date:** September 13, 2006

Dear Friends and Partners of Midewin,

Re: Request for public comments on proposal to demolish old US Army infrastructure

The U.S. Forest Service at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (Midewin) proposes to remove unneeded and unsafe structures on land recently transferred or that will be transferred from the U.S. Army, as part of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, to the Forest Service. Also, proposed for additional removal are structures or facilities that were transferred to Midewin during the first phase of Army land transfers, but not included in the original Environmental Assessment for demolition: *Demolition and Removal of Unneeded and Unsafe Facilities and Structures* (April 2001).

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), I am soliciting public comments and input. Based on the comments received, I will determine if there is a significant impact by conducting the project, and whether to complete an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The enclosed **MAP** shows the proposed sites for demolition activities.

**Purpose and Need:** The purpose and need is to reduce the potential safety hazards associated with abandoned and deteriorating buildings and structures. Removing the old facilities and structures is the first step to restoring the prairie to a more natural condition and preparing the area for safe outdoor recreation opportunities. The many existing structures and other facilities scattered across the Prairie also act as fragmenting features that hamper utilization of sensitive grassland bird habitat.

Midewin's establishing legislation, the Illinois Land Conservation Act (ILCA, P.L. 104-106) targets restoration of the tallgrass prairie. In addition to that legislation, the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Land and Resource Management Plan (Plan) (2002) states in objective 2.7.5, "Within 10 years, reduce 20% of excess facilities, structures, and related infrastructure remaining on site from the former Joliet Arsenal to enhance public health and safety." (pg 2-12) These policies capture the mission for Midewin which is to restore tallgrass prairie and provide for a variety of compatible public recreation opportunities that do not endanger the public. Maintaining unused and abandoned Army infrastructure is not consistent with this legislation or Plan.

**The existing condition** is a mosaic of abandoned and deteriorating buildings, structures, and other types of infrastructure scattered across the landscape of Midewin. The buildings have no foreseeable use to the Forest Service for recreational or administrative purposes. Also, the structures are highly visible so they diminish the scenic quality of the site. Many of the buildings contain transite, a non-friable asbestos building material making them a possible human and wildlife health hazard.



**The desired condition** for this project is demolition and removal of these unsafe features, including specialized removal of transite building materials. The Plan defines the desired condition as, “Former Army facilities and related infrastructure not needed for long term objectives are demolished, removed or properly disposed, and the sites are re-vegetated or stabilized.” (pg 2-11)

**Proposed Action:** Demolition and disposal are proposed for identified structures and buildings, including newly transferred properties and structures that were transferred but not analyzed under the original EA, and properties that are expected to be transferred in the foreseeable future. I propose to remove the old decaying structures and restore a natural landscape that is consistent with the standards and guidelines in the Plan (2002). These demolition activities would take place over time as budget and partnering opportunities allow.

For a complete list of facilities, buildings, and structures that are slated for removal and covered under this EA, and for photos showing examples of the infrastructure we plan to remove, please see [Attachment 1](#) and [Attachment 2](#). The list below shows the type of infrastructure that is planned for removal:

- ✘ Buildings containing transite
- ✘ Bunkers (Only those located west of SR 53 and North of Middle Grant Creek)
- ✘ Foundations
- ✘ Corrugated steel warehouses
- ✘ Brick warehouses
- ✘ “Other” structures (toilet/shower buildings, guardhouses, miscellaneous storage and administrative buildings, loading docks, etc.)
- ✘ Bunkers
- ✘ Poles
- ✘ Roads
- ✘ Rail grades
- ✘ Fencing and posts
- ✘ Railroad Ties
- ✘ Culverts associated with buildings
- ✘ Parking Lots
- ✘ Concrete foundations and bases

To achieve the desired condition, our general approach to demolition and removal activities has been and will continue to be:

- ✘ Abate safety concerns by prioritizing full or partial demolitions
- ✘ Re-use and recycle materials to the extent practicable.
- ✘ Use the Will County Landfill for disposal of debris when appropriate and reasonable.
- ✘ Implement project subject to budget and time constraints.
- ✘ Use partnership agreements when appropriate and reasonable.
- ✘ Prevent visitor access during operations to reduce safety hazards to public

Most work will be accomplished by awarding contracts for demolition activities or material re-use agreements on a competitive bid basis, or by collaborating with partners.

The Interdisciplinary Team has developed **three alternatives** to be analyzed in an Environmental Assessment:

1. Proposed Action: Demolish and remove all unneeded and unsafe former arsenal buildings and structures.
2. Board up all the buildings and fence off the areas with unneeded and unsafe former arsenal buildings and structures, but no removal.
3. “No action” alternative leaving all the buildings and structures in place as is. (A “no action” alternative is required for Environmental Impact Statements and Environmental Assessments.)

**Public Involvement Requested:** Your comments will help us to determine any unforeseen issues that should be considered. When you respond, please consider:

1. Is there any information about the project area that you believe is important in the context of the proposed activities and which the Forest Service might have overlooked?
2. For you or the group you represent, what are the potential effects of this proposal about which you are particularly concerned?
3. Are there reasonable alternative ways to meet the desired condition or purpose and need (the rationale for conducting activities) for which you would like the Forest Service to develop and analyze the environmental effects?
4. Are there issues and concerns which you believe are important and would like to have addressed during the NEPA process? If so, please include your rationale for why they should be analyzed.

We will review and consider all public comments received during this public input period. As the Prairie Supervisor, I will be the deciding official for this project. Due to preliminary studies, I do not believe that the proposed demolition would have a significant impact on the environment based on current information. However, we will analyze the effects of the proposed activities on the biological, cultural, and socio-economic environment, including water, air, soils, sensitive species, federally threatened and endangered species, hazardous materials, recreation, and heritage resources in order to make a final determination.

In accordance with Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215, this information is being made available to the public for a 30-day comment period prior to my decision on whether to proceed with the proposed action. In order to be considered, comments must be substantive, or specific to the actions that are proposed. Please be sure to include your name, address, organization represented, and title. Each individual or representative of a group or organization that submits comments must sign or provide for verification of identity. Please include the title of the document you are commenting on and specific facts and supporting reasons regarding your comments for me to consider.

The opportunity to comment ends 30 calendar days following the date of publication of a legal notice in Joliet Herald News. The publication date in The Herald News is the exclusive means to calculate the comment period. Because the regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period, no comments will be accepted after the 30-day comment period ends.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted. Written comments must be submitted to Logan Lee, Prairie Supervisor, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, 30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington, IL, 60481. Hand-delivered comments will be accepted at the address above during regular office hours, from 8 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Sunday. Oral comments may be provided at the Midewin Supervisor's Office during normal business hours via telephone (815) 423-6370 or in person. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to [comments-eastern-midewin@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-eastern-midewin@fs.fed.us).

Copies of my decision will be mailed to those submitting comments and to those who request copies. If you have any questions about the proposed action or the purpose and need, please feel free to contact Bill Mains, Project Leader, at the address above, by **email**, or by phone at (815) 423-6370. Thank you for your interest in activities at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

Sincerely,



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LOGAN LEE,  
Prairie Supervisor

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie