



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Midewin National
Tallgrass Prairie

30071 South State Route 53
Wilmington, IL 60481

File Code: 1950

Date: December 8, 2000

Subject: Demolition and Removal of Unneeded and Unsafe
Buildings and Structures:
Scoping Notice, Opportunity for Public Involvement

Dear Friends and Partners of Midewin:

The Forest Service at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (MNTP) is proposing to remove unneeded and unsafe structures on transferred Army land. During this initial public comment period, we are providing you with information on the proposed projects, and invite you to send us your specific comments. Enclosed is the background information, the rationale (Purpose and Need) for conducting these activities prior to the final Land and Resource Management Plan, and a description of the proposed activities.

The specific objectives we are trying to accomplish are listed in the attached paper entitled: Purpose and Need.

With this letter, we are initiating the procedures required of the Forest Service by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). We will conduct an Environmental Assessment (EA) on the proposed activities during the next few months. You have been contacted as part of the public involvement process. Your comments on the proposed action will help complete the environmental assessment.

Please consider the following specific questions and respond to any or all of them in writing by no later than January 8, 2001.

1. Is there any information about the project area (MNTP) 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 that you are particularly concerned about?
3. Are there reasonable alternative ways to meet the 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 environmental effects in addition to the ones listed below which you feel are important and would like to have displayed in the EA? If so, please include your rationale for why they should be analyzed.

We will be taking the comments received during this public input period and will consider developing and analyzing alternatives to this proposal as well as considering the analysis of other



environmental effects. We will also analyze a “No Action” alternative as required by NEPA regulations.

One of the purposes of the analysis will be to determine if we can reach a “Finding of No Significant Impact” (FONSI) as required by NEPA regulations. If we can make this finding, the Forest Service can make a decision about conducting the proposed activities without preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As the Prairie Supervisor, I will be the deciding officer for this project.

At this time we do not believe that the proposed activities will have a significant impact on the environment, based on similar activities conducted in the past. However, we will analyze the proposed activities’ effects on the biological, cultural, and socio-economic environment including water, air, soil, sensitive species, federally threatened and endangered species, and cultural resources, to make a final determination.

You will have an opportunity to review and comment on the analysis we conduct, as well as the tentative decision I reach, when I release the Environmental Assessment later this year. My final decision, issued after that, will be administratively appealable under 36 CFR 215.

If you have any questions about the proposed activities or the Purpose and Need, please feel free to contact Bill Mains, Midewin Environmental Engineer, at the address above, by email at wmains@fs.fed.us, or by phone at (815) 423-6370.

Please submit your written comments by January 8, 2001 to Bill Mains at the address above. Thank you for your interest in activities at the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie.

FRANK KOENIG
Prairie Supervisor

Attachment: Purpose and Need Statement

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

Demolition and Removal of Unneeded and Unsafe Buildings and Structures December 8, 2000

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Illinois Land Conservation Act was signed into law on February 10, 1996 (P.L. 104-106) and established the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. The law also established an adjoining national veterans cemetery, two industrial parks, and a county landfill. On March 10, 1997, the Army transferred the first 15,080 acres of former arsenal lands to the USDA Forest Service. The land was transferred with a complex of existing abandoned buildings and structures, many of which contain creosote or transite, a non-friable asbestos building material. In order to comply with the responsibilities and obligations outlined in PL 104-106 to restore a tallgrass prairie, a large portion of the physical facilities built by the Army must be removed.

PROPOSED ACTION

We propose to demolish and dispose of identified structures and buildings to remove potential public safety hazards and restore a natural landscape, consistent with the goals of the Draft Midewin Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Under this proposed action, over the next five years we will demolish and remove structures and buildings as budget permits or partnering opportunities occur. The potential also exists to renovate 2 or 3 brick warehouses for Prairie operations or interpretation. The Final Midewin LRMP (completion expected September 2001) will determine the long-term use of these lands. The proposed actions over the next five years will not preclude options for future land uses contemplated in the Draft Midewin LRMP alternatives.

Buildings and structures identified for potential removal or renovation (see map) are:

- 22 transite warehouses (Group 27)

- 17 bridges (16 railroad and 1 road) on Prairie Creek (creosote timber or concrete & steel).
- 8 other unsafe bridges with 3 to be replaced for Klingler Cemetery access.
- One group of up to 8 bunkers
- 14-15 brick and 3 corrugated steel warehouses, refurbish 2-3 brick warehouses (Group 62).
- 42 other structures and buildings: e.g., toilet/shower buildings, guardhouses, miscellaneous storage and administration buildings, loading docks, etc., located prairiewide.
- Power poles and above-ground water line appurtenances, prairiewide.
- Roads and rail grades associated with the above structures.

Why Do This Now? These actions are necessary because there is public interest in increasing public access to Midewin, and existing structures present a potential safety hazard to the public (attractive nuisance) which must be removed to allow non-supervised recreation activities at Midewin. The structures and other facilities also present an obstacle to prairie restoration either through habitat fragmentation or landscape (visual) fragmentation.

Why Demolition and Removal? The legislated mission of Midewin, including restoration of prairie and provision of a variety of public opportunities, is not compatible with maintaining unused (abandoned) buildings and other structures not of historical or cultural heritage value. The identified structures are abandoned remnants of the former arsenal operations, are generally in deteriorated condition, and not up to a standard to be reused for Prairie purposes. PL 104-106 envisioned removal and disposal of abandoned structures

through provision of additional size to the land area proposed for a Will County landfill to accommodate debris from restoration of the former arsenal land.

General Approach to Demolition and Removal:

- Use the projected Will County Landfill for disposal of debris when appropriate and reasonable
- Proceed subject to budgeting and time constraints
- Use partnering agreements when appropriate and reasonable
- Explore reuse and recycling
- Order of execution will be determined by the opportunities presented by the above 4 conditions

Award of demolition contracts or material reuse agreements will be on a competitive

bid basis, except where partnering will be financially advantageous to the Forest Service, pending Forest Service final NEPA decision.

ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Opportunity to remove structures that cause or may cause resource damage, and eliminate public safety hazards.
- Concern regarding safety to workers and the public when removing asbestos transite building materials.
- Concern regarding general demolition safety.
- Opportunity to use partners to achieve part or all of a project.

**Demolition Removal Project
Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie
Scoping December 2000**

- A. Transite Warehouses
- B. Bridges
- C. Klingler Bridge Reconstruction
- D. Brick & Steel Warehouses
- E. Bunkers

