

Ozark Connection

ISSUE 8

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Update On Forest Plan Revision

IN STEP WITH FOREST PLAN REVISION

In our first edition of the *Ozark Connection*, December 2001, we introduced you to Forest Plan Revision and invited you to accompany us through the process. We held public meetings in early 2002 and explained that the process would be lengthy, and asked that you be patient. Those first meetings were aimed at helping us define the preliminary issues that would drive the planning process. In May 2002, the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan was published in the *Federal Register*. Later in 2002, you sent comments that helped finalize the issues so we could develop alternatives. We had more public meetings in 2004 to show you the proposed alternatives. Based on some of your comments, we modified the original alternatives. From these alternatives, our Forest Supervisor has recommended a "preferred alternative," which will become the Revised Forest Plan and will guide management of the Ozark-St. Francis NFs for the next 10-15 years.

We are now at another crucial period of the process. By now, most of you should have received at a minimum an Executive Summary and CD of the Draft Revised Forest Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Executive Summary, and associated maps. An official 90-day comment period began when these documents were published in the February 25, 2005, issue of the *Federal Register* and will end on May 26, 2005.

Now is your opportunity to submit written substantive comments to tell us if we "hit the mark" or if you feel there are areas that need modified.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

During the review and comment period, the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests will be hosting six open houses to provide you with opportunities to visit with Forest Service personnel. There will be information stations that will explain the process used to determine the "preferred alternative." We will explain the preferred alternative in detail. There will be boards highlighting the differences between the current Forest Plan and revised

Forest Plan. Forest personnel will explain how 9 management areas (current Plan) evolved into 27 management area prescriptions (revised Plan).

Following the comment period, all comments will be examined and analyzed through a process called content analysis. Content analysis helps in the refinement of the alternatives and the selection of the preferred alternative in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Revised Forest Plan.

The FEIS, Forest Plan, and Record of Decision are expected in September 2005 with implementation to begin in October 2005.

UPCOMING OPEN HOUSES

The open houses will provide information stations and give you an opportunity to visit with Forest Service personnel. They are planned for:

Marianna —March 28 Chamber of Commerce 67 West Main Street	6 to 8 PM
Mt. View — March 29 Stone County Library 326 W. Washington Street	6 to 8 PM
Jasper —March 31 Newton County Senior Center 100 Clark Street	6 to 8 PM
Springdale —April 5 Holiday Inn Northwest Arkansas 1500 S. 48th Street	6 to 8 PM
Clarksville — April 6 Pleasant Hill RD Hwy 21 North	4 to 6 PM
Russellville —April 7 Lake Dardanelle State Park 100 State Park Drive	6 to 8 PM

Comment sheets will be available at the open houses for your convenience. You may either take the time to fill them out at the open house or you may mail or fax them to the Planning Team.



DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CURRENT AND DRAFT REVISED PLANS

The Proposed Revised Land and Resource Management Plan contains many differences from the current LRMP. The following table compares some of the main differences between the two plans:

Current Plan	Draft Revised Plan
9 Management Areas	27 Management Area Prescriptions
Emphasizes Commodity Outputs	Outputs are Result of Achieving Desired Conditions
Annual Prescribed Fire: 40,000 Acres	Annual Prescribed Fire: 120,000 Acres
Harvests approximately 12,000 Acres Annually	Harvests approximately 15,000 Acres Annually
54,000 Acres Oak & Pine Woodland Restoration	220,000 Acres Oak & Pine Woodland Restoration
Emphasizes Developed Recreation	Shifts Recreation toward Day Use and Activities that Benefit Tourism
6 Scenic Byways, 6 Wild & Scenic Rivers, 17 Special Interest Areas	9 Scenic Byways, 7 Wild & Scenic Rivers, 21 Special Interest Areas

In addition to the items compared above, the Draft Revised Plan:

- ◆ Recommends 471 acres of acquired lands as wilderness in the Eastfork, Leatherwood, and Richland Creek Wilderness Areas.
- ◆ Recommends 22 miles of the North Fork of the Illinois Bayou as a Wild and Scenic River.
- ◆ Recommends the Wedington Unit of the Boston Mountain Ranger District as an urban recreational forest.
- ◆ Adds Indian Creek and Upper Buffalo as dispersed non-motorized recreation areas.
- ◆ Recommends the addition of a wildlife emphasis area, with emphasis on elk management, adjacent to the Gene Rush Wildlife Management Area.

MANAGEMENT AREA PRESCRIPTIONS

One major focus of the proposed revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) is allocation of management area prescriptions (MAPs).

The proposed revised LRMP has 27 MAPs. These are areas with different attributes that require different management emphasis. In most cases, the MAP has boundaries that are defined by a road, stream, or other “on-the-ground” feature. This is called “place based management.” It has both public and administrative benefits. Examples are MAPs 6.E and 6.F: the Upper Buffalo and Indian Creek Dispersed Recreation Areas, non-motorized. These areas emphasize a dispersed recreation experience, where no off-highway vehicles (OHVs) are allowed. The description of the MAP tells the public how this area is managed and what conditions they can expect .

The major components of each MAP are:

- ◆ An **emphasis** and **desired future condition** (DFC) which describe in detail the primary management focus of the area. DFCs are descriptions of ecological, economic, and social attributes that characterize the outcome of land management. Although DFCs have different time frames, many should occur within 10-50 years. Progress toward reaching DFCs is priority and budget driven.
- ◆ **Objectives** providing direction to achieve desired future conditions.
- ◆ **Strategies** or **standards** providing managers with specific management direction as they work toward reaching desired future conditions.
- ◆ **Monitoring** that enables managers to see if the techniques and tools being used are actually achieving the desired future conditions. If not, necessary changes can be implemented along the way.

As you get a chance to study the proposed revised plan, review each MAP to get an overall view of our Forests in the future.

TIPS ON EFFECTIVE COMMENTING

Involving the public in Forest Plan Revision is very important to the Forest Service. Printed copies of the Draft Revised Plan, DEIS, and Executive Summary are available for viewing at Ozark-St. Francis National Forests offices and many public libraries. These documents are available on the Forests' web site (www.fs.fed.us/oof/ozark/projects/planning/revision.html). Please call Planning Team members Kathy King (479-964-7551) or Cary Frost (479-964-7507) if you have any questions.

The following points will enable all of us to get the most out of your review of these documents:

- ◆ Your name is required on your comment.
- ◆ Submitting a comment is not a voting process.
- ◆ Comments are considered on basis of content, not quantity.
- ◆ Substantive comments are specific, comparative, or solution-oriented and provide factual information, professional opinion, or informed judgment that is relevant to the action being proposed.

While all comments on the DEIS and Draft Revised Plan will be considered, only substantive comments are addressed in the FEIS. Commenting is your opportunity to affect alternatives and analysis that form the basis for a final decision. All comments will be considered and, as a result, alternatives may be modified, analysis may be modified or adjusted, and/or factual corrections will be made.

Comments can be mailed to: Forest Planning 605 West Main Street Russellville, AR 72801; faxed to 479-964-7285; or sent to the following e-mail address: r8.ozark.planning@fs.fed.us

Substantive comments and Forest Service responses will be documented in the FEIS.



FOREST FACTS

PRESCRIBED FIRE: EVOLUTION OF AN INVALUABLE TOOL

Numerous researchers have attempted to describe the pre-settlement landscape of the Ozarks. All agree that the landscapes of the past were very different than those of today. Most were dominated by fire-adapted vegetation where periodic, low-intensity fire (lightning-caused and human-related) maintained ecological conditions that guaranteed a dynamically changing, yet stable perpetuation of flora and fauna. The life histories of various tree species and other life forms and their response to fire have helped explain how the frequency, intensity, and seasonality of fire in the pre-settlement forest has contributed to the overall functioning of the ecosystem.

Records dating from the 1600s indicate that Native Americans were a part of the natural ecosystem and their use of fire was a major contributor to the development of stable ecosystems. In the early 1800s, early settlers employed fire to clear or maintain open lands and improve forage conditions in woodlands. Around the early 1900s, the Forest Service acquired worn out farms and cut over timberlands. Initial forest management focused on fire suppression and replanting cutover areas. The fire suppression trend continued through the 1970s. After studying the full effects to forest health caused by years of fire suppression, prescribed burning was initiated in the 1990s.

Currently, the proposed Revised Forest Plan increases the number of annual prescribed fire acres and identifies prescribed burning as a silvicultural tool vital to achieving the goals of the *Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003* and necessary for hazard fuel reduction. Hazard fuel reduction promotes public safety and reduces the probability of catastrophic wildfires occurring during years of extreme droughts. Also, this increase in annual prescribed fire acres will begin the process of ecological restoration, forest health implementation, wildlife habitat improvement, and non-native invasive species management. Wildlife thrives in areas treated with prescribed fire. The fire recycles nutrients into the soil, increasing the elements needed to promote healthy plant growth. In areas treated with fire, flowering annuals and biennials flourish and are more visible to birds, butterflies, and animals. Grasses grow more rapidly and are more nutritious and digestible for many species including deer, turkey, quail, and dove.

Prescribed fires are conducted by highly trained specialists and wildland firefighters who control the intensity of the fire by analyzing factors such as humidity, wind speed and direction, temperature, fuel moisture, and atmospheric conditions. Strict criteria must be met before igniting a prescribed fire. Prescribed fires do, however, produce smoke. The Forest Service understands how smoke can negatively affect human health and safety and has worked with state agencies to develop rigorous guidelines in an effort to reduce the amount of smoke that impacts the surrounding areas.

CHANGES IN PLANNING PERSONNEL

When Forest Plan revision began in December 2001, Forest Supervisor, Charles "Charlie" Richmond; Planning Staff Officer, Duane Dipert; and Planning Team Leader, Deryl Jevons, were integral parts of the revision effort. Recently, they have each left the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests to pursue new endeavors.

Charlie is the new Forest Supervisor on the Grand Mesa, Umcompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests in Delta, Colorado. Maureen Hyzer is the current Acting Forest Supervisor.

Duane retired after 30 years of service with the Forest Service. Gary Knudsen is now the Planning Staff Officer.

Deryl is the Public Affairs Staff Officer on the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs in Springerville, Arizona. The present Planning Team Leader is Cary Frost .

The Ozark-St. Francis NFs appreciate the leadership and insight that Charlie, Duane, and Deryl provided during the beginning stages of the plan revision process and wish their predecessors success through the remainder of the process.

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