

## DECISION MEMO

**USDA Forest Service R-8  
Ozark National Forest  
Mt. Magazine Ranger District  
Logan County, Arkansas**

***Mt. Magazine/Bear Hollow Prescribe Burn Project***

### **I. DECISION**

It is my decision to implement a prescribe burn project on approximately 2,369 acres of National Forest land in Logan County, Arkansas. This burn will be located in Sections 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 29 of T6N, R25W; and in Sections 17, 18, 19, 20, 29 and 30 of T6N, R24W. See the enclosed map for the location.

The burn is set up in seven separate burn blocks. The 2,369 acres of proposed burning will likely be done in one to three block increments.

Aerial ignition using a helicopter could be used in the interior of the burn and burning crews on the ground will be used for line ignition. The proposed burn will be done on an approximate two to three year rotation for the next 10 years. This rotational burning could begin sometime in October 2010 and continue through 2020.

The primary purpose of this burn is to reduce hazardous fuels. About 84% of the area is hardwood and hardwood-pine forest types with the remaining acreage being in pine and pine-hardwood forest types. The area is currently covered with a moderate to heavy accumulation of fuel.

Prescribed burning will be used to reduce these fuels and mitigate the impacts of a possible wildfire. In 5 to 6 years, heavy accumulations of fuels can build up, posing a threat from wildfire to all forest resources. Prescribed fire is the most practical way to reduce accumulations of combustible fuels in large forest acreages. Wildfires that burn into an area where fuels have been reduced by prescribed burning cause less damage and are much easier to control.

The main focus in fuels reduction burning is to protect the communities at risk. The Mt. Magazine State Park is located within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and is at risk of a wildland fire that may occur within the National Forest lands that border this state park. There are several residences, communication sites and towers, and structures such as cabins, a lodge, a visitor center, campground, and picnic areas located in the park that are at risk from wildland fire.

In addition to fuel reduction benefits, burning will also have beneficial effects on the wildlife habitat in this area. Prescribed burning will temporarily remove some small trees and shrubs, but not roots, bulbs, and seeds. These will be stimulated by fire and will soon sprout. Yield and quality increases occur in herbage, legumes, and browse from hardwood sprouts. Openings are created for feeding, travel, and dusting. These new sprouts will provide forage for certain wildlife species. Burns also increase production of fruits such as blackberry, low bush

blueberry, and grasses. As a result, many small mammals that feed on seeds and grass usually increase after prescribed fire.

Approximately 175 acres of the burn area is being burned in a cooperative effort with The Nature Conservancy and Mt. Magazine State Park. These areas are located behind the Visitor Center, around Signal Hill, and in the Cameron Bluff Campground. This collaborative effort is focusing on restoring habitats of species identified by Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategies (CWCS) as being species-at-risk. These species occur in open and dry vegetation types typical of Arkansas woodland, savannas, prairies, and glades. These species are dependent on open woodland structure and herbaceous understory habitat maintained by periodic fire during their life cycles. As a result of fire suppression, most of this type of habitat has become increasingly limited due to densification of vegetation. In addition, the glade habitat has been encroached by surrounding vegetation including eastern red cedar. This current condition plays a large part in the loss of degradation of habitat suitable for pine/oak woodlands and glade dependent species-at-risk in these areas. Restoring these habitats requires establishing a suitable fire regime that promotes open oak woodland and open and shrubby glade habitats.

Control firelines for the burn units will consist mainly of existing roads, trails, dozer lines, and natural barriers. These existing firelines total approximately 17 miles. Bulldozed firelines will be rehabilitated following completion of the prescribe burn by waterbarring and seeding with wildlife seed mixtures.

Additional management activities that have occurred in the project area include prescribed burning for wildlife habitat and fuel reduction. This previous burning has covered approximately eighty percent of the area. The remainder of the area has been subjected to over 50 years of fire exclusion.

Historic occurrence of fire in the project area is not known for certain. Mean fire return interval for the project area is expected to be similar to that which has been found for study sites in the Boston Mountains as documented by recent research. This research has found the Mean Fire Interval (MFI) for three study sites in the Boston Mountains ranged from 4.6 – 16 years for the period of 1680-1821, 2.0-3.1 years for the period 1821-1880, and 62->80 years for the period of 1921-2000. Based upon this research and the similarity of the project area to the research sites, occurrence of fire and ecological benefits from it have been severely curtailed in the project area.

## **II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION**

I find the proposed action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment because it fits category 31.2 (6), described in Forest Service Handbook id\_1909.15-2007-1, February 15, 2007. Category 31.2 (6) is for “timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities which do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction.” No herbicides will be used in this treatment and existing roads will be used to access the area.

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment. I considered: 1) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, and Forest Service sensitive

species; 2) floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds; 3) congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas; 4) inventoried roadless areas; 5) research natural areas; 6) American Indians and Alaska Native religious and cultural sites; and 7) archaeological sites and historic properties or areas.

### **III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Scoping for this project began with the mailing of the proposed action to adjacent landowners and interested citizens on June 15, 2010. This list included letters to nine Native American Tribes, the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, Arkansas State Parks, and the Nature Conservancy. The scoping package contained a description of the proposed action, a map depicting the proposed action, and a comment form. A total of 35 letters were mailed.

A copy of the proposed action letter was posted on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/oof/ozark/projects/planning/magproject.html>.

This project was also listed in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter FY 2010 Schedule of Proposed Actions and posted on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/oof/ozark/projects/planning/spa.html>.

One comment was received as a result of this scoping. The response to this comment is contained in the project files.

### **IV. FINDINGS RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

This project is consistent with the objectives of the Revised Land and Resources Management Plan for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests.

### **V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f).

### **VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This decision may be implemented immediately.

### **VII. CONTACT PERSON**

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Vicki Weindel, NEPA Coordinator, Mt. Magazine Ranger District, P.O. Box 511, Paris, AR 72855; (479) 963-3076; fax (479) 963-8055; e-mail: [vweindel@fs.fed.us](mailto:vweindel@fs.fed.us).

**VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE**

/s/ Rob Kopack

07-27-10

ROB KOPACK  
Deputy District Ranger

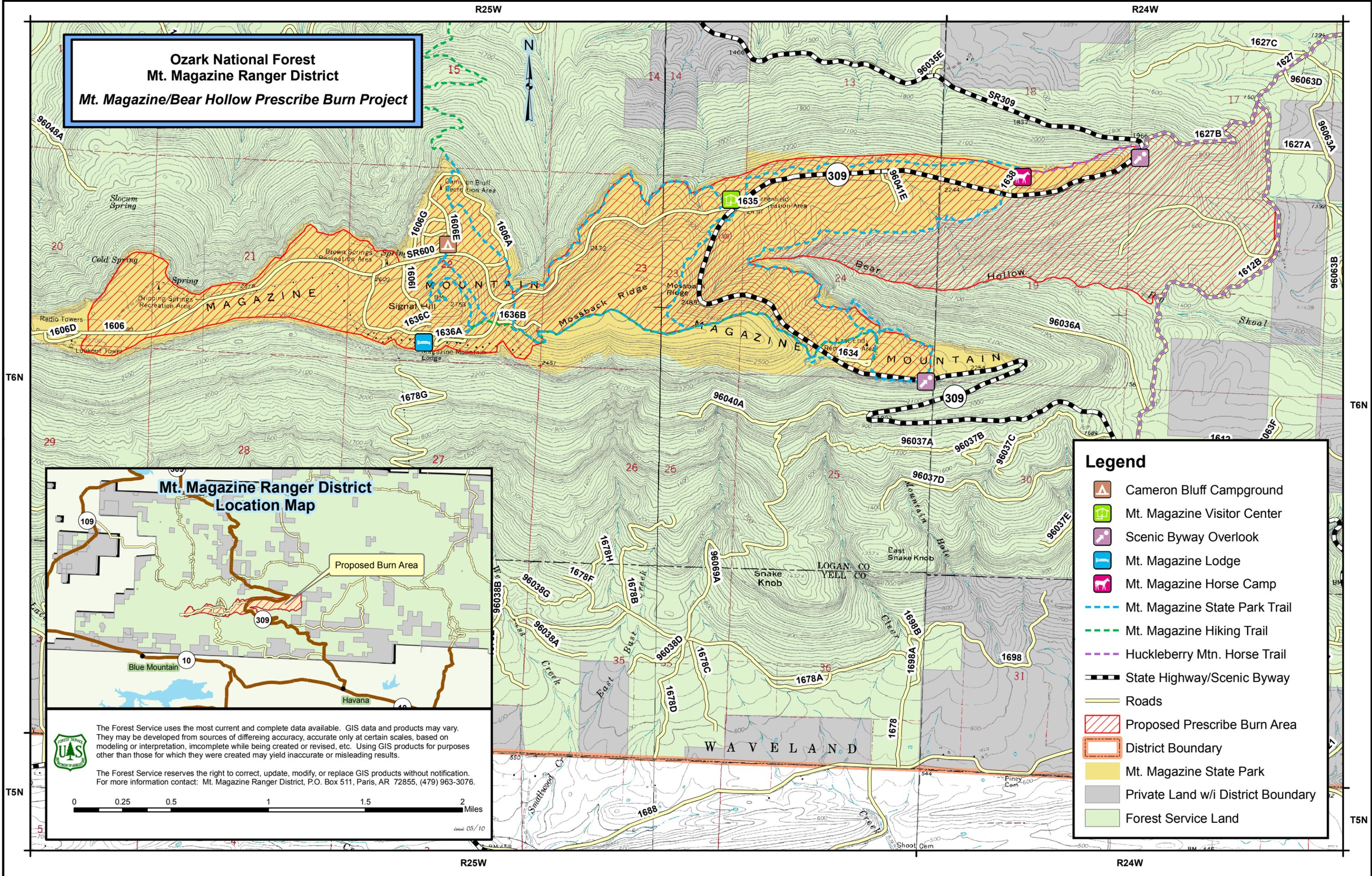
Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employee.

**Ozark National Forest  
Mt. Magazine Ranger District  
Mt. Magazine/Bear Hollow Prescribe Burn Project**



**Legend**

- Cameron Bluff Campground
- Mt. Magazine Visitor Center
- Scenic Byway Overlook
- Mt. Magazine Lodge
- Mt. Magazine Horse Camp
- Mt. Magazine State Park Trail
- Mt. Magazine Hiking Trail
- Huckleberry Mtn. Horse Trail
- State Highway/Scenic Byway
- Roads
- Proposed Prescribe Burn Area
- District Boundary
- Mt. Magazine State Park
- Private Land w/i District Boundary
- Forest Service Land

The Forest Service uses the most current and complete data available. GIS data and products may vary. They may be developed from sources of differing accuracy, accurate only at certain scales, based on modeling or interpretation, incomplete while being created or revised, etc. Using GIS products for purposes other than those for which they were created may yield inaccurate or misleading results.

The Forest Service reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace GIS products without notification. For more information contact: Mt. Magazine Ranger District, P.O. Box 511, Paris, AR 72855, (479) 963-3076.

0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles  
Date 05/10