



## Decision Memo

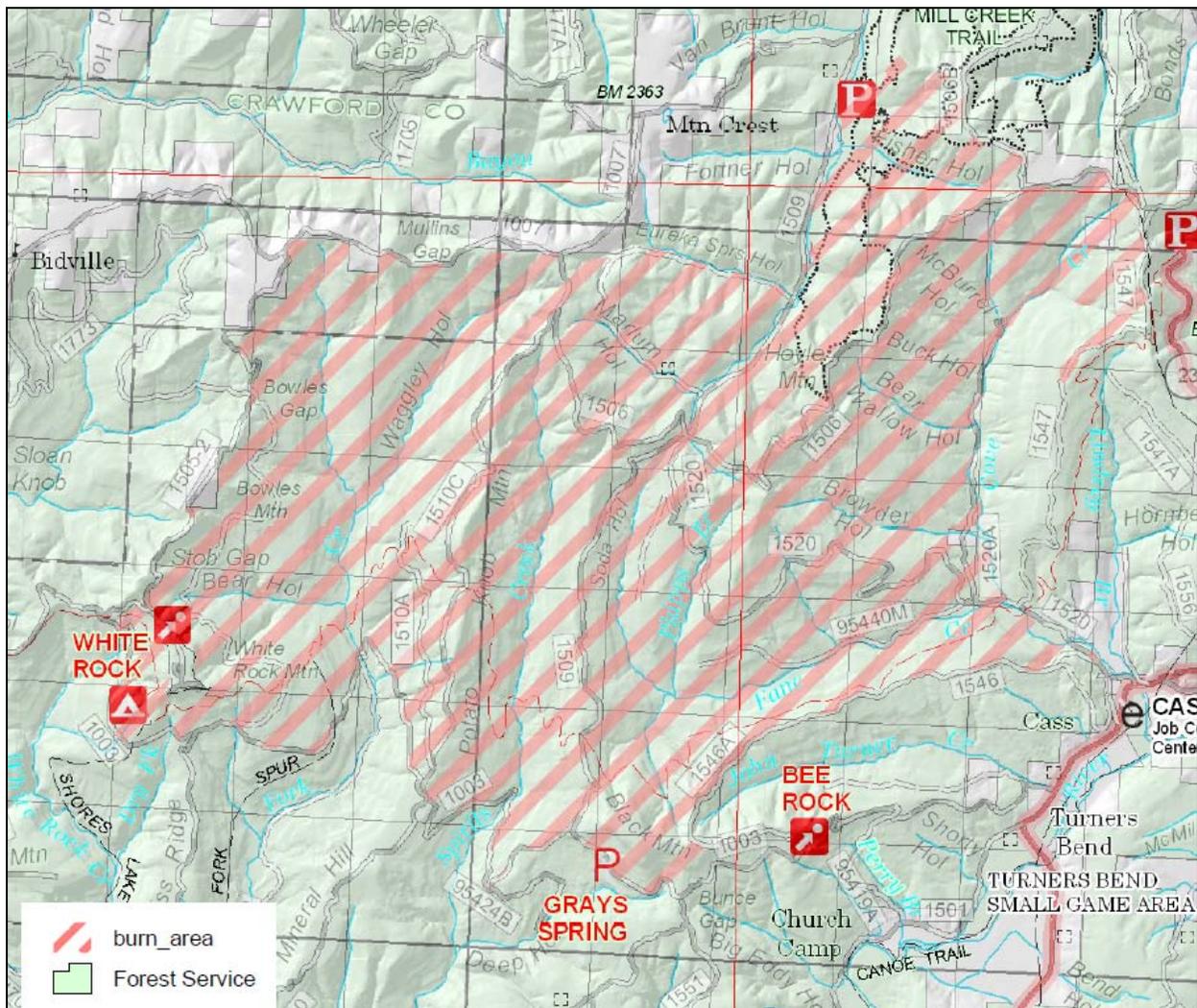
### *Spud Rock Prescribed Burning Project* USDA Forest Service Boston Mountain Ranger District

#### Ozark-St. Francis National Forests

#### Crawford and Franklin Counties Arkansas

### Background

The Boston Mountain Ranger District is proposing to control burn approximately 17,900 acres of National Forest land on the main division east of White Rock Mountain in Crawford and Franklin Counties, Arkansas (see map) . None of the activities will occur on private land unless previously agreed to. The proposed activities are referred to as the *Spud Rock Prescribed Burning Project*. We will continue to use prescribed burning as needed with an interval following the forest plan guidelines





## **Decision and Rationale for Categorical Exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act**

I have decided to implement the Spud Rock Prescribed Burning Project which involves a control burn of approximately 17, 900 acres of National Forest land. Controlled burning is needed in this area now to help restore growing conditions for small herbaceous plants and forbs by stimulation of nutrient recycling increasing the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor. This will improve wildlife habitat and diversity by increasing food and shelter supplies. Controlled burning is an appropriate management tool to provide species habitat and increased wildlife viewing opportunities, reduce fuel buildups, and control non-native invasive vegetation and pests.

Based on my review of the project file and the rationale described below, I have determined that this is an action with no associated extraordinary circumstances having a significant effect on the human environment.

The Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1507.3 provide that agencies may, after notice and comment, adopt categories of actions that typically do not have a significant effect on the human environment and therefore do not require preparation of an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement (40 CFR 1500.4(p), 1501.4(a)(2), 1508.4).

A categorical exclusion is not an exemption from NEPA, but rather a method of complying with NEPA. Categorical exclusions are administrative tools to promote efficiency in the NEPA review process by reducing excessive paperwork for those categories of actions that, based upon extensive practice and experience, have been determined not to have (individually or cumulatively) significant environmental effects. Forest Service categorical exclusions are set forth at 36 CFR 220.6(e).

A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and if:

- (1) The proposed action is within one of the categories established by the Secretary at 7 CFR part 1b.3; or
- (2) The proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR 220.6(d) or (e).

The mere presence of one or more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion (CE). It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions, and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist. I have determined that this action is within the following category:



36 CFR 220.6(e)(6) Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction. Examples include, but are not limited to: (iv) Prescribed burning to reduce natural fuel build-up and improve plant vigor

- I have considered the following resource conditions in my determination of the presence of extraordinary circumstances and whether the extraordinary circumstances that are related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement:

- a. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species

According to the 2010 review of the updated 2005 BE for this project there will be no negative impacts to threatened, endangered or sensitive species and their habitats.

- b. Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds

Best Management Practices (BMPs) for these practices will be followed to ensure the protection of water quality. Floodplains and municipal watersheds will not be negatively impacted. Wetlands will not be affected.

- c. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas

None occur, so there will be no impact.

- d. Inventoried roadless areas

None occur, so there will be no impact.

- e. Research natural areas

None occur, so there will be no impact.

- f. American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas

Sites within the project boundaries will be protected from any ground disturbing activities associated with this proposed action. Only historic site areas containing no organic cultural materials will undergo prescribed burning. Past research has shown that sites such as these will not be affected by a low-intensity prescribed burn, and the use controlled burning can be an effective management tool for long-term site protection.

## **Public Involvement**

A proposal to implement the Spud Rock Prescribed Burning Project was first provided to the public and other agencies for comment on 2 February 2011. The proposal was mailed to persons owning land within one mile of the proposed activities and to people who have expressed an



interest in activities conducted by the Boston Mountain Ranger District. The agency also provided a notice of the availability of the scoping document in the Fort Smith, AR, *Times Record* - the newspaper of record. In all, 57 scoping letters were mailed. We did not receive any responses.

### **Findings Required by Other Laws**

This decision is consistent with the Revised Ozark-St. Francis National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP 2005). The planning process that guides this management plan is in compliance with the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (16 U.S.C. 528-531). The overall goal of managing Forest Service lands is to sustain the multiple uses of its renewable resources in perpetuity while maintaining the long-term productivity of the land. Resources are to be managed so they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people. This project was designed in conformance with forest plan decisions to protect and improve renewable resource quality while maximizing net public benefits.

The management practices associated with these actions involve the manipulation of vegetation. Specifically these practices shall:

1. *Be best suited to the multiple-use goals established for the area with potential environmental, biological, cultural, aesthetic, engineering and economic impacts, as stated in the regional guide and forest plan considered.*

The project meets the intent of the Forest Plan and the multiple use goals of the area. No significant environmental impacts are predicted.

2. *Be chosen after considering the potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.*

These practices were chosen after considering the potential effects on the adjacent area. No effects are anticipated for residual trees and adjacent stands.

3. *Avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources.*

This project avoids permanent impairment of site productivity and ensures conservation of soil and water resources.

4. *Provide the desired effects on water quantity and quality, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired species, forage production, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.*

These practices do not significantly change the noted qualities of the area.

The management practices associated with these actions do not have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on the human health or the environment of minority or low-income populations (Executive Order 12898, 2/11/94).



## Implementation Date

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (f) This project may be implemented immediately. For further information regarding this project, contact Frank Palmer at (479) 667-2191.

PAT A. KOWALEWYCZ

District Ranger

3/7/2011

Date

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