

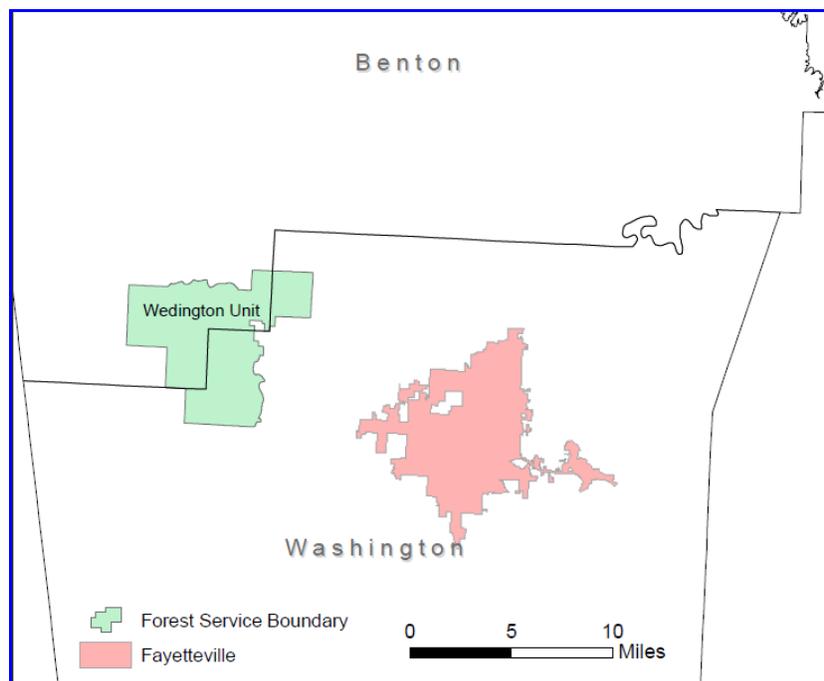


File Code: 1950

Date: March 31, 2011

Dear Reader:

The Boston Mountain Ranger District proposes wildlife, recreation, and vegetation improvements on National Forest land on the Wedington Unit in Benton and Washington counties, Arkansas. This scoping letter serves as notification of the project to people who would be interested in these types of activities. None of the activities would occur on private land.



### Project Area Vicinity

The project area is the Wedington Unit located in northwestern Arkansas northwest of Fayetteville. More detailed maps of our proposed actions are at the end of this document.

The Wedington Unit of the Ozark National Forest provides a majority of the opportunities for public outdoor dispersed recreation including wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting, and trail use for the growing major metropolitan areas of northwestern Arkansas. This urban forest provides large natural landscapes that contribute to the quality of many types of outdoor recreational activities, diverse habitats important to maintaining wildlife populations, a source of high-quality wood products for local and regional economies and recharge areas for numerous basins that provide water for many communities.



If the Wedington Unit is to provide recreation benefits without experiencing unacceptable negative consequences to its resources we need to apply effective management solutions in order to maintain the structure and function of this urban forest through time and for the benefit of present and future generations

The actions we propose were developed from field reviews that determined management needs for this area based on the goals established by our Forest Plan, (on the web at [www.aokforests.com](http://www.aokforests.com) - select land and resource management planning) and conditions encountered on the land. The interdisciplinary team proposing these actions consists of foresters, biologists, a recreation specialist, engineering technician, and fire management officer.

## **Management Needs for the Wedington Unit**

### ***WILDLIFE/FISHERIES/OPENINGS AND PASTURES***

- The existing docks at Lake Wedington are in disrepair and need to be replaced.
- Lake Wedington is infested with yellow floating heart, an invasive non-native aquatic plant.
- Largemouth bass in Lake Wedington are stunted due to overcrowding.
- Vandalism has occurred in the small game area (designated as a wildlife viewing area), Chambers boat launch, and the Odell tract.
- Many areas are infested with non-native invasive species such as privets, kudzu, seresia lespedeza, and multiflora rose.
- Tree encroachment, especially eastern red cedar on openings is threatening to change the character of these special habitats
- There is a need for more access to hunting and other activities for an increasingly less mobile and older public.
- The grazing allotments need to be evaluated and maintained in conjunction with wildlife habitat and watershed enhancements.

### ***RECREATION***

- Portions of the trail along Lake Wedington are eroding into the lake and are in need of repair and/or relocation.
- Additional trail-related recreation opportunities are needed.

### ***TIMBER***

- The Wedington Unit is over stocked with poor quality hardwood trees of early successional species, growth of slower growing trees has become stagnant, and there is a scarcity of understory herbaceous vegetation.

## Proposed Actions

### WILDLIFE

- Install ten mobile wheelchair accessible hunting blinds throughout the entire Wedington unit to allow mobility impaired hunters to have a quality hunting experience.
- Construct two wildlife viewing platforms (wheelchair accessible) at Lake Wedington and in the small game area. Install tree/plant species interpretive signs along the lake trail at Lake Wedington and along the Tower trail.
- *“Energy for Wildlife” Habitat:* Work cooperatively with National Wild Turkey Federation, Southwestern Electric Power Corporation, and American Electric Power to improve powerline right of way openings for wildlife habitat. Plant/encourage native grass establishment in the powerline right-of-way running along Tower road and east of Tower road in Sections 22, 23, 27, and 28, T 17N, R 32W. Activities may include one or more of the following: planting of native warm season grasses, wildlife forages, and wildflowers; maintenance of right-of-way corridors through prescribed burning, brush hogging and/or mowing; herbicide spot treatments of non-native invasive plants; planting of native brush/shrubs on the edges; wildlife stand improvement thinning along the adjacent forest to attract wildlife including migratory birds (approximately 250 acres).
- *Small wildlife openings:* Eradicate non-native invasive species and deter woody encroachment on openings through mechanical or herbicide treatments. Plant forest-approved wildlife forages, native grass species. Other activities may include liming, fertilizing, and discing. Maintenance activities may include prescribed burning, herbicide spot spraying or brush hogging. Approximately 20 acres.
- Eradicate fescue, privet, multi-flora rose, sericia lespedeza and other non-native invasive species. No more than 1,000 acres maximum per year out of the 15,000 acre project would be sprayed with appropriate herbicide as surveys indicate the need.
- Establishment of native grasses, wildflowers, and trees in the Lake Wedington Recreation area and along Highway 16, section 4, T 17N, R3 2W, north and south sides of the highway (approximately 20 acres). We have eradicated kudzu here which has left bare areas devoid of vegetation and areas where other invasives have replaced the kudzu. Activities may include: planting of native grasses wildflowers, trees or shrubs; prescribed burning; and/or spot spraying with herbicide as needed.

### FISHERIES

- Add large woody debris to area streams as needed to increase pool/riffle ratios and to increase habitat for many aquatic communities.
- Fence range allotments to exclude cows from riparian areas. Install stock tanks with pumps where needed.
- Construct one pond, ½ acre in size, in Wedington #4 allotment for cattle watering.

- Construct/reconstruct gates, vehicle barriers and support structures at the Small Game Area, Chambers boat launch and the Odell tract to protect watershed resources.
- Improve fisheries on Lake Wedington by providing fish structure and fertilization /liming of lake as needed.
- Eradicate a non-native invasive plant species: yellow floating heart on Lake Wedington using aquatic herbicide as needed.
- Maintenance of Lake Wedington dam: Debris removal through mechanical methods, prescribed burning, and/or herbicide applications.
- Removal of largemouth bass from Lake Wedington to prevent overcrowding and stunting as surveys indicate the need.
- Install an interpretive sign with a wash station at the Lake Wedington boat ramp to discourage the spread of non-native invasive species.
- Replace the existing docks at Lake Wedington with wheelchair accessible docks.

## **LARGE OPENINGS/PASTURES**

Refer to map A for locations of openings.

- Treatments may include one or a combination of the following: Herbicide treatment to remove fescue, woody encroachment or other non-native invasive species; prescribed burning; planting of-native warm season grasses, wildlife forages, and/or wildflowers; planting of native soft mast shrubs/trees to break up the fields and to provide cover, foraging, and nesting habitat for wildlife; brush hogging; fertilizing and liming as needed; hay removal; native seed harvesting; fence construction/ maintenance and fence removal.
- If an allotment is removed from the grazing system, it may be utilized for hay cutting or sprayed with herbicide to remove the fescue and planted in native grasses, wildlife forages, and/or wildflowers.
- *Wildcat range allotments 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6; Range allotments: 8, 9, 11, 12, and 16.* Continue the existing cattle allowance for each allotment.
- *Range allotments 7 and 10:* We sprayed these with herbicide and planted native warm season grasses. These allotments are inactive and cattle grazing would no longer be permitted. Activities for these areas may include the same as those proposed for the other openings.
- *Wedington #13 and Fort Smith Land Exchange pastures:* Eradicate non-native invasive species and plant in native grasses, forest-approved wildlife forages and wildflowers. Plant native hard and soft mast tree species for wildlife habitat forage and cover. Maintenance activities as described above.
- *Wedington Small Game Area & Odell Tract.* Eradicate non-native invasive species and woody encroachment. Maintenance activities as described above.

## RECREATION

See Map B for locations of activities proposed at Lake Wedington.

- Develop a trail management plan for the Wedington Unit.
- Develop gravel parking lot (approximately ½ acre) on west side of lake. Improve parking north of lake and obliterate parking lots off Highway 16 and on the east side of lake south of cemetery.
- Trail reconstruction and improvements around the lake, clearly designate segments as foot traffic only, bike use allowed, and/or handicap access.
- Installation of new fishing piers.

## TIMBER

These actions are designed to help in stimulating vigorous growth in trees. This aids in carbon sequestration which occurs at a higher rate when trees are allowed to grow unhindered by competition.

Wildlife/Timber Stand Improvement (WSI and TSI) – (approximately 12,602 acres): Thins the hardwood stands by removing fast-growing early successional tree species in the understory and midstory creating gaps in the canopy to allow sunlight to reach the ground. The goal is to favor mast producing species and herbaceous vegetation on the ground that is beneficial to wildlife. Chemical methods and/or prescribed burning would help maintain a clean understory and promote herbaceous vegetation. WSI and TSI improvements would be accomplished using chainsaws, hand tools, or conventional ground-based equipment and would favor white oak, northern red oak, ash, and hickory.

Thinning - (approximately 947 acres): Thinning the pine stands would remove less vigorous trees to reduce competition between remaining trees. This would increase growth and vigor of the remaining trees and increase their resistance to disease and insects. Thinning these stands would also increase the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor and improve conditions for ground level plants such as bluestem grasses and forbs. We would use prescribed burning as needed to maintain the open understory. We may create up to 8 miles of temporary roads to facilitate timber operations which would then be closed and re-seeded.

Refer to map A for locations of timber treatments.

## PRESCRIBED BURNING

We propose prescribed burning as a management tool in timber, wildlife, recreation, and ecosystem enhancement activities to provide and enhance species habitat and wildlife viewing opportunities, reduce fuel buildups, and control non-native invasive vegetation and pests. It also enhances the character of the urban forest by creating a more open setting that is aesthetically pleasing. Other benefits to the Wedington Unit would include stimulation of nutrient recycling: by increasing the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor growing conditions will improve for small herbaceous plants, increasing browse and soft mast production for wildlife.

The entire Wedington Unit would be subject to periodic prescribed burning as conditions warrant the need. Not all of these areas would be burned at one time. We may create up to 10 miles of fire line to aid in control of these burns.

Protection measures for the controlled burns include burning within Forest Service guidelines and protecting travelers on major forest roads from reduced visibility due to smoke. The areas would be monitored after burning by Forest Service personnel to assess the effectiveness of the prescribed burns.

### COMMENTS REQUESTED:

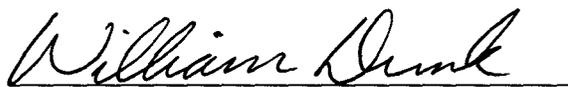
I invite your comments on this proposal. To be most helpful, please be as specific as possible when responding. We will use these comments in our multi-disciplinary team to identify issues and develop alternatives to this proposal for my consideration. I anticipate that an environmental assessment will be prepared which will be mailed to those who commented on this project and to those who request a copy. It will also be available on our website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark/projects/planning/bostonmtnproject.html>

You can return your comments referencing this project using the attached comment form by mail to the address on the form. Oral or hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., local time. You may also call or fax your comments to the numbers on the letterhead, or email them to [comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bostonmtn@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bostonmtn@fs.fed.us).

The Forest Service will accept appeals of the decision only from those who commented or expressed interest in the proposal before the close of the 30-day comment period beginning the day after the date of the legal notice of availability of this information in the *Southwest Times Record*, the newspaper of record for projects on the Boston Mountain Ranger District. All comments will become part of the project record available for public review.

I appreciate your interest in this project. If you have questions on this proposal, please call Rhea Whalen or me at 479-667-2191.

Sincerely,

  
WILLIAM DUNK

District Ranger

Enclosures

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

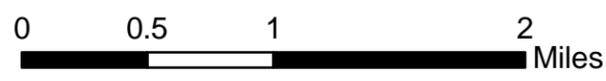
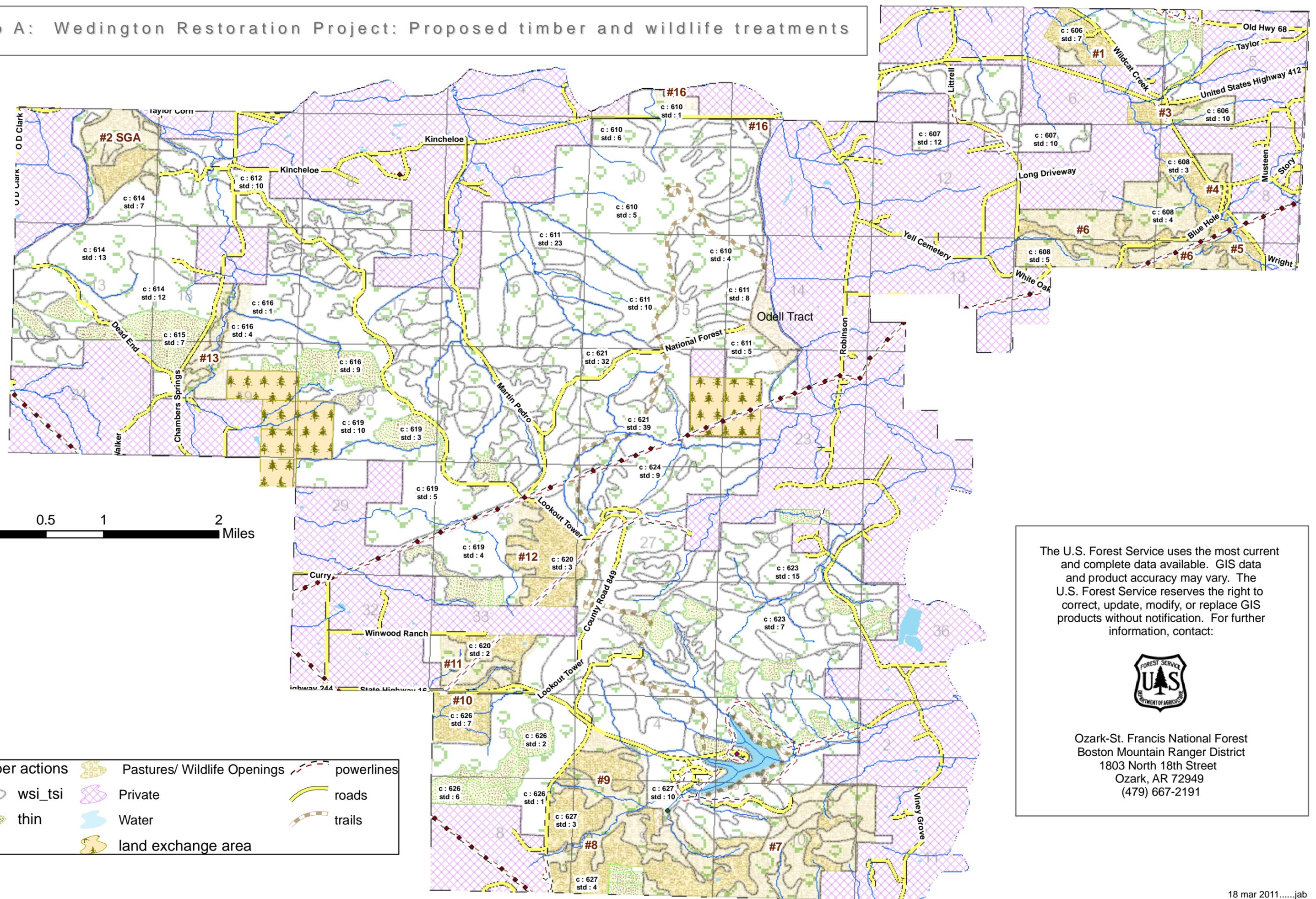
Email \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

Do you want us to contact you regarding your comments? \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your completed comment form to 1803 North 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Ozark, AR 72949. Comments are also accepted verbally at 479-667-2191 or by email at [comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bostonmtn@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bostonmtn@fs.fed.us). Your input is important.

# Map A: Wedington Restoration Project: Proposed timber and wildlife treatments



- |                |                             |            |
|----------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| timber actions | Pastures/ Wildlife Openings | powerlines |
| wsi_tsi        | Private                     | roads      |
| thin           | Water                       | trails     |
|                | land exchange area          |            |

The U.S. Forest Service uses the most current and complete data available. GIS data and product accuracy may vary. The U.S. Forest Service reserves the right to correct, update, modify, or replace GIS products without notification. For further information, contact:

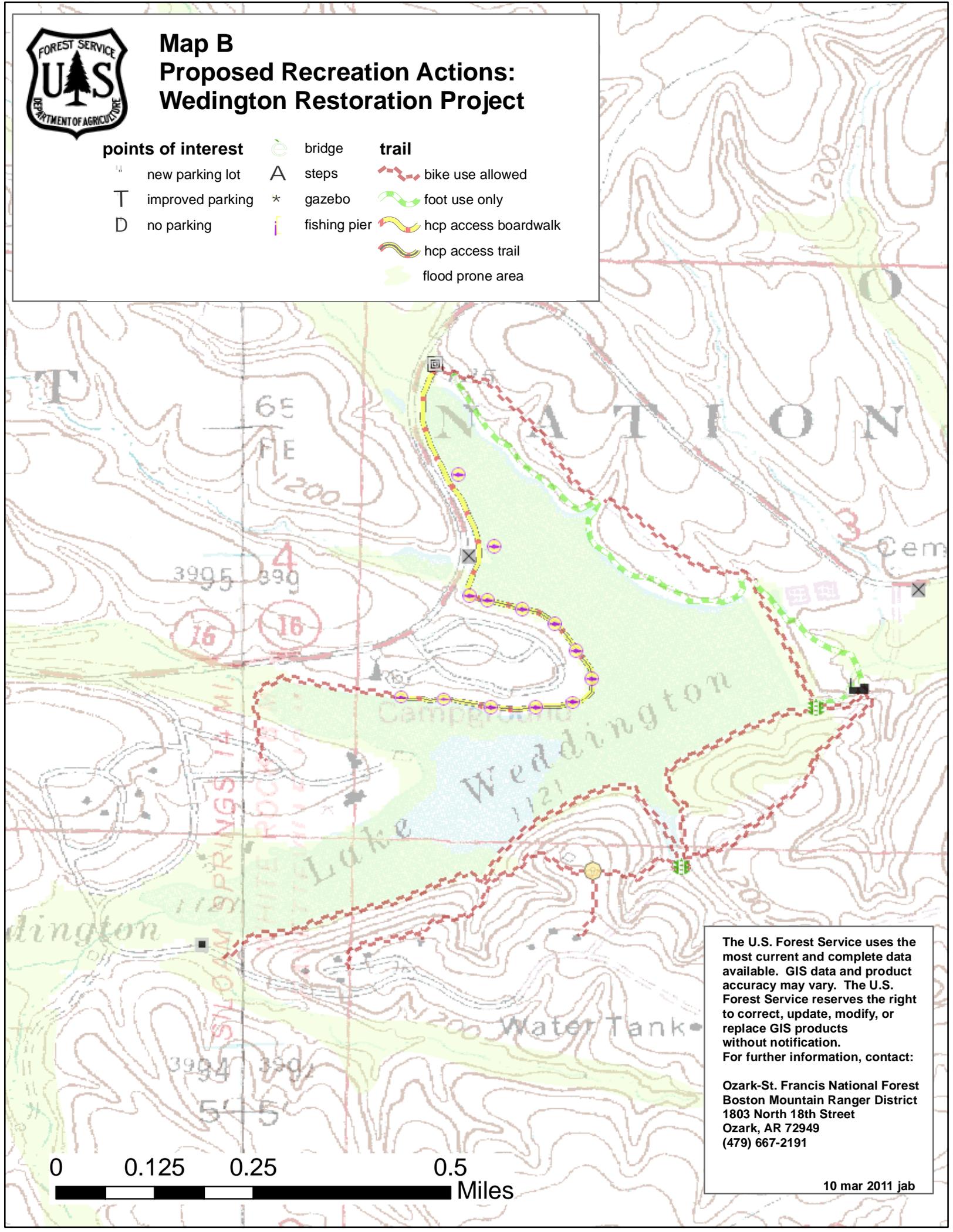


Ozark-St. Francis National Forest  
 Boston Mountain Ranger District  
 1803 North 18th Street  
 Ozark, AR 72949  
 (479) 667-2191



# Map B Proposed Recreation Actions: Wedington Restoration Project

- |                           |              |                      |
|---------------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| <b>points of interest</b> | bridge       | <b>trail</b>         |
| new parking lot           | steps        | bike use allowed     |
| improved parking          | gazebo       | foot use only        |
| no parking                | fishing pier | hcp access boardwalk |
|                           |              | hcp access trail     |
|                           |              | flood prone area     |



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10 mar 2011 jab