

Request for Comments

RE: Job Number 080392 Newton Co. Line-South (Passing Lanes) (Hwy. 7) Pope County

This project was scoped initially from March 23rd, 2012 through April 26th, 2012 and is being scoped again in light of a recent court ruling (Sequoia ForestKeeper v. Tidwell, 11-cv-00679-LJO-DLB (E.D. Cal.)), the Forest Service will provide public notice, comment, and opportunity for administrative appeal for projects and activities documented with a "Decision Memo" (36 CFR 220.6(e)) until new instructions are issued by the Washington Office, or the Agency issues regulations addressing the Court's ruling. Only those who provide comment or express interest in this proposal during this comment period will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) is proposing to add a 1.3 mile north bound passing lane on Highway 7 in northern Pope County (In the area of the Oak Grove Cemetery). A portion of the project is within National Forest lands on the Big Piney Ranger District and is approximately 3 tenths of a mile (This would result in the AHTD taking an additional .53 acres of National Forest land for their Right Of Way). The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), in cooperation with AHTD, is preparing an environmental document for this project.

The U.S. Forest Service will be the deciding agency which would allow or not allow for an amendment to the AHTD's current Right Of Way easement due to the potential affect to National Forest lands.

The proposed improvements consist of widening the existing 10-foot wide travel lanes to 12 feet and adding a 12-foot wide north bound passing lane with a six foot wide shoulder on the north bound passing lane side and an eight foot wide shoulder on the south bound lane currently the shoulder width is three feet. This would result in the right of way being expanded by 80 feet to a total of 130 feet.

The National Forest portion of this project appears to fit 36 CFR 220.6(e) (3) "Approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land". This notice is directed at people interested in commenting on the National Forest portion of this project proposal only.

I would like to hear your project specific comments (for the National Forest portion) regarding the activities proposed. I am particularly interested in identifying any extraordinary circumstances that may exist in the project area and/or any activity that when implemented would negatively affect the environment and/or its inhabitants.

Please address your comments to: Mark Burge, Acting District Ranger, Big Piney Ranger District, 12,000 SR Hector, AR 72843 or email your comments to: comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-bayou. If comments are received this decision would be appealable. Your comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days starting the day after publication of the legal notice for this project in Russellville's *The Courier*.

Additional information or maps may be obtained by contacting Mike Mulford at the District Ranger's office in Jasper, AR phone 870-446-5122 ext5136.

