



File Code: 1950

Date: May 29, 2012

Dear Reader,

The Pleasant Hill Ranger District of the Ozark National Forest is proposing to maintain forest health and manage vegetation through regeneration harvests and thinning. The actions we are proposing also include enhancing wildlife & fish habitat, decommissioning roads (some by gating) while improving others, and reducing the build-up of hazardous fuels through prescribed burning or mechanical & handtool/herbicide fuel reduction. The project area, which includes a total of 10,974 acres (8,608 ac.=Govt), includes compartments 460, 461, 462, 487, 488, 494, 495, and 667. Approximately 2,366 of these acres are privately owned. The legal description is T13N R25W Sections: 14-16, 20-23, 26-34; T12N R25W Sections: 3-6, 8-10, 15 and 16. The project area is bounded by JO 5099 & MA 4795 on the east & south, JO 5051 & MA 4685 on the west, and the National Forest boundary on the north. The project area falls within Management Areas: Ozark Highlands Trail (2.A.), Mixed Forest (3.C.), High Quality Forest Products (3.E.), and Riparian Corridors (3.I.).

We are asking for suggestions or ideas you may have that will help us make the best decisions on managing your public lands in this area. The proposed action will be called the "**Pea Prong**" project.

Hardwood stands are recommended for regeneration cutting to perpetuate this forest type and to create a variety of age classes, thereby, promoting diversity; thinning other forest stands is proposed to promote vigor and thriftiness of the remaining trees. Prescribed burning and herbicide/handtool/mechanical treatments would follow harvesting/thinning of hardwood and pine to: prepare the ground for seedfall or planting, and stimulate wildlife benefits. Timber products in the form of sawlogs, small roundwood, and firewood would be generated by these actions in the near term as well as providing for a future sustainable supply. Habitat diversity for animals and plants, including threatened, endangered, and/or sensitive species would be maintained or improved by the effects of the timber, wildlife, recreation, and access management. Reduction of wildfire risk by prescribed burning is also proposed as well as closing roads no longer needed for land management. This proposal would maintain or improve the plant and animal diversity to meet overall multiple-use objectives as described in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan.

All work being proposed is on National Forest lands only. **No work would occur on privately-owned land.** However, the Forest Service would solicit contracts with private landowners via Wyden/Stevens agreements, which allow the Forest Service to carry out prescribed burn treatments on private lands adjacent to federal land.

Vegetation Management

Hardwood Shelterwood followed by Site Preparation & Burning would occur on 1,122 acres (27 stands). This treatment would sustain long-term forest health, provide for the succession of early seral habitat, and contribute to a sustainable forest. These stands are mature; growth has slowed and the trees are beginning to decline. Removing some of the larger trees would open up the area and allow young productive trees to become established. After harvest, these stands will have site preparation treatments of herbicide/handtool/mechanical methods and controlled burning to reduce competition of the desirable species.

The objective of a shelterwood is to open up the stand allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor while leaving an adequate amount of trees to provide seed. As the name implies, several trees would be left in the overstory to give shelter to the developing regeneration on the ground. The mature hardwood left over from the harvests will remain until the new stands receive their first thinning. The combination of stump/root sprouts from oak species and the other desirable seedlings will establish the new stands. An average stand density-basal area of 20-40 ft² would be targeted.



Connected Treatments for the Hardwood Shelterwood stands: If desired species adequately replenish the new stands by natural means, **release** measures may be implemented using handtools/herbicide/Rx burning, if necessary, to reduce competing vegetation. This would occur within 3-7 years after harvest. If desired species fail to adequately establish new stands, **planting & release** of oak species will be required.

Hardwood Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) - Midstory Treatment & Burning would occur on 799 acres (14 stands). These stands are mostly immature sawtimber, but do have a component of mature trees; they have a dense midstory and understory of desirable/undesirable species. Removal of the undesirable species will allow oak and other desirable species currently in and underneath the midstory to be released and become competitive. The success of this treatment, via handtool/herbicide means, would allow a regeneration harvest to be considered next entry. Prescribed burning may follow this treatment to further control unwanted competitors of oak.

Pine & Hardwood Thinning followed by TSI- Midstory Control would occur on 233 acres (12 stands) of pine and 883 acres of hardwood (20 stands). Thinning would increase growth of residual trees, reduce the susceptibility of the stand to insect and disease, and improve habitat for wildlife. The stands would be thinned to a target basal area of 50-70 ft²/acre. Trees that are suppressed or that have poor form would be removed. Trees of good form and/or close to the correct spacing would be favored over trees that are simply of larger size. The target spacing of trees would depend on the average tree diameter of the stand. Prescribed burning following thinning would provide beneficial effects for wildlife. TSI treatments of the midstory using herbicide and/or handtools may be utilized to further reduce competition.

Pine Site Preparation, Planting, and Release is recommended in one stand, approximately 30 acres. This stand was harvested about forty years ago to promote rangeland for cattle. Later, it was planted to pine seedlings, but failed. Now, it has grown up into hardwood brush and trees that will require heavy site preparation measures through mechanical and herbicide methods. After site preparation, planting with pine seedlings is recommended. Subsequent treatments of release will be needed to ensure pine seedlings survive to fully stock the stand.

Oak Woodland Thinning is proposed for 12 stands, about 660 acres. This prescription is recommended for stands that produce only minimum levels of timber volume, or, in other words, approach low-quality conditions. Commercial harvest will be employed where practicable to maintain about 45-50 trees per acre. Where it is not practicable, fire, herbicide, and non-commercial thinning will be used to maintain this density. Some of the more accessible areas will be offered as firewood products for local use.

The following road work would be done to access timber stands, improve/maintain watershed and riparian conditions, and protect/enhance wildlife habitat:

Reconstruction is proposed on approximately 11 miles of road. These are old existing roads situated on somewhat stable templates that show signs of age where spots of erosion are occurring and drainage crossings are crumbling. Reconstruction of these will stabilize them, thereby reducing erosion and sediment that reaches streams.

Maintenance on approximately 22 miles of open and closed roads would be performed in this project in order to obtain a suitable road condition for hauling timber. County roads that would be used are regularly maintained by their respective counties, along with Forest Service assistance. Closed roads are temporarily opened during the timber/silvicultural activities, then re-closed after activities are completed with gates or mounds to reduce erosion caused from vehicle traffic and to protect wildlife habitat.

Decommissioning on approximately 11 miles of existing roads no longer needed for management or access are proposed. This entails restoring roads to a more natural state. Activities used to decommission a road can include, but are not limited to the following: reestablishing former drainage patterns, stabilizing slopes, restoring vegetation, blocking the entrance to the road, installing water bars (earthen mounds), and removing culverts. Unnamed and illegally accessed OHV trails that are present in the project area may be closed using debris, rocks, earthen mounds, or gates.

Temporary roads: approximately 7 miles would be needed to access timber stands. These roads would be blocked, then rehabilitated with seeding and/or natural re-vegetation. Temporary roads are not intended to be included as part of the forest transportation system as they are managed for short-term projects or activities, then decommissioned after use.

Gate installation: approximately 6 gates would be installed leading to the new wildlife openings. This will improve/maintain watershed conditions and wildlife habitat by reducing disturbance from vehicles and providing recreational experiences to forest users by limiting areas to walk-in hunting and wildlife viewing.

Access: adjacent landowners whose property blocks access to Federal land will be contacted by the Forest Service. Neighbors of the forest will be asked to consider allowing entrance to these, otherwise, inaccessible areas for forest management and fire protection.

Non-native Invasive Species control: efforts would be made to restore native grass and forb vegetation (Big/Little Bluestem, Indian grass, switchgrass) to replace non-native invasive species (NNIS) such as fescue, sericea lespedeza, and Johnson grass on Federal lands within the project area. Roadways would be evaluated where they run through public lands to determine the need for native vegetation restoration, as well as interior forest stands where invasive trees have become insidious, such as Ailanthus and Mimosa.

Wildlife Habitat Improvement

Six New Permanent Wildlife Openings will be constructed by marking small clearcuts in timber sale units (where applicable). Construction will consist of dozing, herbicide/handtool application, and burning, then followed by seeding, liming and fertilization. These openings will be maintained with brush hogging, burning, herbicide/handtool application, and seeding/fertilizing on an approximate 2-year rotation. New access roads associated with wildlife openings would be gated.

Riparian Stand Improvement (RSI) along streams: is recommended to reduce flood velocities by recruiting larger trees into this zone. These trees will eventually fall in place; others will be cut and left where they are and some will be cut to fall into the streambed. Slowing water velocity will allow fine material to drop out during floods, which will increase soil productivity. It would increase the potential for this wood laying in the floodplain to be imported into the actual channel. This would expand the amount of habitat for small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians in the riparian area. RSI would occur in these streams and their tributaries: Lick Branch, Pea Prong, and Friley Creek.

Hazardous Fuel Reduction Burning

All of the Forest Service land within the project area (8,608 acres) would potentially receive low- to moderate-intensity prescribed burns to reduce hazardous fuels and wildfire risk during both the dormant and growing seasons. Prescribed burning may be done on a 3-10 year rotation throughout the Pea Prong project area in Management Areas 3.C. and 3.E. Prescribed burning would provide associated benefits to wildlife through improvement in forest floor vegetation abundance and diversity. Fire would also benefit wildlife by improving hard-mast producing species (oak/hickory) in the seedling and sapling stage by reducing competition from fire-intolerant species.

The comment period for the Pea Prong project lasts for 30 days following publication in the Johnson County Graphic. If you can provide additional information that will help us make the best decision on the proposed project, please contact me or Tom Cravens at (479) 754-2864; or mail to: District Ranger, Pleasant Hill Ranger District, 2591 Hwy 21, Clarksville, Arkansas, 72830. Our e-mail address is: comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-pleasanthill@fs.fed.us

Sincerely,

/s/ Pat Kowalewycz
PAT KOWALEWYCZ
District Ranger

