

DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

USDA Forest Service R-8
Ozark National Forest
Pleasant Hill Ranger District
Johnson & Madison County, Arkansas

Compartments 460, 461, 462, 487, 488, 494, 495, 667

Pea Prong

DECISION NOTICE (DN)

Based on an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service specialists, decisions have been made regarding management actions for forest health, ecosystem restoration and wildlife habitat over the next several years for the Pea Prong project. Decisions have been made for:

- Pine and hardwood forest stand management and the connected actions of site preparation for regeneration, midstory control, release, timber stand improvement (TSI), and pre-commercial thinning (PCT)
- Roadwork to access the forest management areas, together with decommissioning of roads
- Wildlife habitat improvements consisting of opening construction and prescribed burning
- Riparian management of vegetation near watercourses for fisheries and stream habitat improvement and flood control
- Prescribed burning for vegetation management, wildlife enhancement, and hazardous fuel reduction
- Control of non-native invasive species

These actions are planned to implement the Ozark-St. Francis Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP-Revised 2005) goals and objectives for the timber, recreation and wildlife resources within the project area. In general, the objectives for management in the project area are to restore ecosystem health and sustainable conditions, increase plant and wildlife diversity, reduce forest fuel loading through restoring a more frequent fire-return interval, reduce conflicts between motorized vehicles and other resource values, increase Forest visitor safety and provide forest products to the public. The management actions designed to meet these objectives address issues and concerns expressed by the public and the interdisciplinary team.

The project area includes a total of 10,974 acres (National Forest land – 8,608 acres; and private land – 2,366 acres). 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.).

Based on the analysis documented in the EA, it is my decision to implement **Alternative 3**. These actions will have some impact on National Forest lands from vegetation management and wildlife habitat improvement work.

Private lands may be involved in the completion of prescribed burning to restore ecosystem health and reduce forest fuel loading, but only with consent of the landowner along with completion of applicable agreements.

Specifically, the following actions are planned:

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT:

TIMBER HARVESTING:

Hardwood Shelterwood followed by Site Prep Herbicide & Burning would occur on 1,122 acres. This treatment would sustain long-term forest health, provide for the succession of early-seral habitat, and contribute to providing a sustainable forest. 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 existing desirable seedlings will establish the new stands. An average basal area of 20-40 ft² would be retained.

After harvest, these stands will have herbicide (and/or handtools) applied to undesirable stems by the hack and squirt or cut-stump method, then burned to prepare the site for natural/artificial regeneration.

Hardwood shelterwood will be done in stands C460-16; C461-2, 10, 12, 38; C462-6, 7, 11, 19; C487-2, 12, 16, 20, 22; C488-3, 4, 16, 35; C494-23; C495-5, 8, 11, 16, 18; C667-6, 7, 11.

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, 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 seedlings will be required.

Pine and 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 60-70 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 would depend on the average diameter of the trees in 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 of the remaining trees. Stands to be thinned are: C460-3, 9, 16, 21, 25; C461-7, 9, 14; C462-1, 3, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15, 19, 21-26; C487-2, 12, 16, 22; C488-19; C494-1; C495-5, 11; C667-2, 7.

Hardwood Pre-commercial Thinning (PCT) with handtools/herbicide would occur on 2 stands (36 acres). This is a treatment used in stands that are not commercially mature. The purpose of PCT is to remove small, unmerchantable trees that are competing with desired hardwood species. This treatment would allow for the selection of the trees with the best form to remain and to free them of competition. Prescribed burning may follow this treatment to further control unwanted competitors of oak. This treatment will occur in C462-10, 13.

Hardwood Timber Stand Improvement (TSI) - Midstory Treatment & Burning would occur on 748 acres (13 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 competitors of oak. TSI activities will be done in stands C460-7, 16; C487-4, 5, 7, 14, 17, 19, 21; C488-8, 15, 21, 38.

Pine Site Preparation, Planting, and Release are recommended in one stand, approximately 30 acres (C667-1). 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 on 12 stands, about 661 acres. These stands are situated on marginally productive soils. They will be thinned, either commercially or otherwise, to a 40 ft² density and maintained throughout most of its 150-year life span at this spacing. At age 150, the trees will, ideally, be commercially harvested via the shelterwood method. A pool of advanced oak regeneration should be in place by the time the overstory is removed. Rx burning will be done on a 3-5 year return-interval until age 150, at which time burning will halt to allow oak seedlings to become firmly established. Thinning (or TSI) during this 150-year rotation can be done either commercially or non-commercially, and can be accomplished by handtool or herbicide means, too. Stands along good access roads can be thinned as firewood sales.

Oak Woodland Thinning will occur in stands C461-8, 11, 17; C462-2; C487-3; C488-10, 24, 25, 31, 36; C494-3; C495-3.

Prescribed Fire and Mechanical Fuels Reduction

Prescribed Fire and/or Mechanical Fuels Reduction would occur on approximately 8,608 acres of federal lands within the Pea Prong analysis area. Prescribed fire treatments may occur on private lands located within the analysis area, but only after consultation with landowners and a prescribed fire agreement under the Wyden Amendment (Section 334(a) of Public Law 105-83) and/or Stevens agreements in cooperation with the Arkansas Forestry Commission. Should agreements with private landowners be signed, private lands would be burned under prescription in conjunction with prescribed burns on public lands. Prescribed fire would be utilized for several purposes in the analysis area in both the dormant and growing seasons. Prescribed fire would serve to re-introduce fire into a fire-adapted ecosystem, promote oak regeneration in canopy openings created by red oak borer damage/oak decline, promote regeneration in shelterwood and seedtree harvest areas, maintain pine/hardwood stands in open conditions, increase herbaceous understory species density and diversity, improve habitat conditions for fire-dependent special-status plants, increase soft-mast production and reduce potentially hazardous accumulations of fuels on the forest floor, and improve wildlife habitat conditions. Prescribed burning may be done on a 3-10 year rotation throughout the Pea Prong analysis area in Management Areas 3.C. and 3.E.

Roadwork will be completed to improve administrative access within the analysis area and implement vegetation management; it will consist of reconstruction of 16.1 miles, maintenance of 21.8 miles of existing roads, and decommissioning of 13.3 miles of road.

Maintenance will consist of blading existing roadways and drainage structures, and adding spot gravel and installing drainage structures where needed. Roads (miles) to be maintained are:

94461A (0.29)	94462H (0.07)	94487A (0.31)	MA4600 (0.56)
94488B (0.38)	94494A (0.19)	1497 (8.67)	MA4685 (1.81)
1526 (0.39)	1540A (0.54)	JO5099 (6.22)	MA4795 (2.38)

Reconstruction would occur on approximately 16.1 miles of roads. These roads are not maintained on a regular basis thus requiring more work than the roads that require maintenance. Reconstruction would bring these roads to their approved traffic service level. Roads (miles) to be reconstructed are:

94460A (0.39)	94462A (2.45)	94495B (0.41).	1526 (0.52)
94461A (0.43)	94488A (1.0)	94667A (0.84)	1540 (5.78)
94461B (1.58)	95495A (0.71)	1508B (1.81)	1540A (0.18)

Decommissioning of roads will occur on a total of 13.3 miles of roads:

94460B (0.34)	94462D (0.92)	94495B (0.72)	1526A (2.10)
94460C (0.61)	94462E (0.20)	1497/1540 (1.21)	1540A (0.75)
94461B (0.49)	94462F (0.11)	1508B (0.32)	
94462B (0.38)	94462H (0.53)	1526 (4.62)	

Temporary roads will be constructed (approx. 7 mi.), usually with a crawler tractor, to a low standard for one-time timber removal. Water diversions will be installed where needed. Following timber harvest, these roads will be blocked, obliterated by fertilizing, and revegetating with a mixture of grasses and forbs. Closed temporary roads will be managed as linear herbaceous strips for wildlife in appropriate locations.

Gate installation- a total of 6 gates may be required to block motorized access to the new wildlife openings.

Recreation:

Recreational experiences should not change significantly with implementation of the proposed action. OHV users will have to post-poner their activities on the designated route while timber harvest actions are in progress.

Maintenance of the Ozark Highlands Trail may be possible through grant dollars with the proposed action.

Heritage Resources

The project has been designed so that all sites that may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, or that are of “undetermined eligibility,” lie outside any of the project’s areas of planned ground-disturbing activity. Historic site areas which contain no organic cultural material will undergo prescribed burning. Past research has shown that sites such as these will not be affected by a low-intensity prescribed burn.

Should any additional sites be found during project implementation, they will be examined by a professional archeologist (mitigation measure 3), who will prescribe necessary mitigation measures.

Based on these findings, all sites will be preserved intact and no significant adverse effects will be produced upon significant historical or prehistoric sites that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

WILDLIFE & FISHERIES HABITAT IMPROVEMENT:

Wildlife Openings:

Six wildlife openings would be constructed or expanded. They will be constructed in forest stands (where applicable) by timber harvest, then by dozing & burning, herbicide application,

seeding, liming and fertilization. Once constructed, the openings will be disked and seeded with either cool season or warm season grass/forb seed mixtures. Native shrubs may be planted in them or along their edges. Short access roads associated with wildlife openings would be gated.

Openings will be maintained with brush hogging, burning, herbicide application, and seeding/fertilizing on an approximate 2-year rotation. Openings will be constructed in C462-1, 2, 3, 7, 11, 12, 14; C487-19, 25; C488-6.

Riparian Stand Improvement (RSI) along streams: I have decided to drop this treatment that is proposed for Lick Branch, Pea Prong, and Friley Creek. The practical application of this technique, which is to improve fisheries habitat while controlling flooding, is still in the analysis stage and, in my opinion, has still not been proven to perform as advertised. In my observation, I feel that there now exists plenty of naturally-standing dead and downed trees in these flood-plains to accomplish the intended benefit of habitat improvement. Right now under this decision, I do not think it is necessary to artificially mimic what is being achieved by natural means.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

Implementation of Alternative 3 using the mitigation measures as shown on pages 18-20 of the EA will have some effects on the environment. These effects are stated on pages 23-78 of the EA and are summarized in Table 3 on pp.21-22 of the EA. Environmental effects by various resource categories are briefly described as follows:

Soil & Water – The proposed project falls within the Headwaters Mulberry River (1111020106) watershed. At the smallest scale, the proposed project is located in a sub-watershed consisting of the Lower Little Mulberry Creek (111102010602). Some natural erosion occurs on the project lands in the watershed analysis area. Soil disturbance (including compaction) is the major contributor to sediment loading in rivers and streams, as well as reducing productivity of soil properties. Soil productivity will be reduced on approximately 222 acres (8% of the activity area) during the logging and other operations. No more than 15% of an activity area can sustain a reduction in soil productivity, according to the LRMP standard. If more than 15% of the activity area sustains a reduction in soil productivity, mitigation measures must be installed. Soil disturbance for this project will be well within the LRMP standard. Road work (including temporary roads), skid trails, and log landings will be highly disturbed and have some degree of compaction. The area of soil disturbance is directly related to on- and off-site movement of soil and soil nutrients through erosion processes. Bladed firelines would be seeded and water-barred when prescribed burning is completed to speed recovery of soil productivity and to prevent erosion. Road reconstruction and maintenance will stabilize roads and prevent loss of productivity on soils adjacent to these roads and will reduce erosion and sedimentation.

Herbicides - The herbicides glyphosate, triclopyr, imazapyr, imazapic and hexazinone have the potential to be applied for site preparation, TSI, PCT, release, and wildlife opening creation. Additionally, non-ionic surfactants may be mixed with herbicides in order to improve application success. Under Alternative 3, no herbicides will be applied by foliar methods.

With use of listed mitigation measures (pages 18-20, EA), no significant long-term degradation or cumulative effects, including state standards, on soil and water quality are anticipated from implementation of this alternative.

Air - Prescribed burning for hardwood site preparation, pine and hardwood thinning, TSI/PCT, wildlife opening maintenance, ecosystem health, non-native invasive species control, and hazardous fuel reduction will release approximately 7,534 tons of carbon dioxide along with lesser amounts of other emissions into the atmosphere on a daily basis. Burns will follow approved burning plans to manage the smoke and burning intensities. Mitigation measures will ensure compliance with federal, state and local clean air requirements. A further mitigation is to burn no more than ~1,500 acres/day to lessen smoke intensity and duration. No long-term cumulative effect is anticipated from implementation of the selected action. Arkansas voluntary smoke management guidelines will be followed to assure adherence to air quality regulations to manage smoke from prescribed fire so the smoke's impact on people will be acceptable.

Climate Change - With this alternative, some of the carbon currently sequestered in vegetation and soils will be released back to the atmosphere. In the short-term, greenhouse gas emissions and alteration to the carbon cycle will be caused by hazardous fuel reduction activities, harvests and thinning overstocked stands. In the long term, however, these actions will also increase the forest's ability to sequester additional carbon, improve the forest's resilience to the potential impacts of climate change and decrease the potential for uncharacteristically severe wildfires.

Road Work – maintenance of 21.81 miles and reconstruction of 16.1 miles of several existing roads followed by road closures and rehabilitation, will have some effect on soil erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat, vegetation and other resources. Use of mitigation measures, such as water diversion structures, use during dry weather, closure to traffic after use, and other measures will lessen road impacts to acceptable levels. Through planned maintenance and rehabilitation measures, the overall long-term cumulative effect of the planned roadwork is considered low. Decommissioning of 13.3 miles of existing open roads will improve water quality, wildlife habitat, vegetation and recreation opportunities in the project area.

Six gates may be erected to restrict motorized traffic access to the newly-constructed wildlife openings.

Heritage Resources – The project has been designed so that all sites that may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, or that are of “undetermined eligibility,” lie outside any of the project's areas of planned ground-disturbing activity. Historic site areas which contain no organic cultural material will undergo prescribed burning. Past research has shown that sites such as these will not be affected by low-intensity prescribed burning. Should any additional

sites be found during project implementation, they will be examined by a professional archeologist (mitigation measure 3, EA p. 19) who will prescribe necessary mitigation measures. Based on these findings, all sites will be preserved intact and no significant adverse effects will be produced upon significant historical or prehistoric sites that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Vegetation and Vegetation Diversity – Of the 8,608 acres of total public lands in the project area for which vegetation was analyzed, 8,557 acres are suitable for timber management. Currently, the project area does not have a balanced age-class with 85% of stands being 80 years or older. Implementing the selected alternative will create about 1,726 acres of within-stand diversity change and 1,122 acres of between-stand diversity change from timber harvesting and connected actions. Some additional diversity will be introduced by the planned stand midstory control and site preparation, release and TSI/PCT actions, as well as prescribed burns, and wildlife opening construction. No conversions of forest types will occur. With the project area containing timber that is from 41-100+ years old on 89% (~7,690 acres) of the area, the impact of planned harvests, road reconstruction, maintenance, wildlife opening construction/reconstruction, and prescribed burning will have no negative effects on the overall, long-term vegetation diversity. About 34% (2,895 acres) of the area's "timber management-suitable" acreage will remain designated for old-growth management.

Wildlife – With implementation of Alternative 3, approximately 1,122 acres would be converted, through harvest and subsequent regeneration, from the 81-100 year age classes to the 0-10 year age class. Browse and early-successional forest habitat would be provided in these regeneration areas for a variety of wildlife species. Viability of disturbance-dependent avian species would be enhanced. Avian species requiring both large and small areas of early successional vegetation and forest edge would benefit. Implementation of shelterwood harvesting would result in 13% of the public land-base within the project area compartments in early successional forest habitat, as opposed to <1% under current conditions. In addition, approximately 43 acres in the 61-100 year age class would be converted to grass/forb habitat (wildlife openings).

Implementation of Alternative 3 would result in a 12% reduction of forest habitat that is greater than 81 years old (within project area compartments). Following implementation of this alternative, 77% of the forested (both pine and hardwood) public land base within the project area compartments would remain in the 81-100+ year age classes. When considering recruitment of stands from the 61+ year age classes (approximately 313 acres or 4% of project area land base) in the next 20 years, then examining the distribution of stand age-classes, fragmentation of interior forest habitat is not anticipated.

The effects of Prescribed Burning on roughly 8,608 acres of federal land and 2,366 acres of private land (if consent of landowner is given) will be the replacement of brushy and woody vegetation in the understory to a more grass and forb composition, benefiting quail, deer, and neo-tropical migratory birds. Oak regeneration would be encouraged, fuel accumulations would

be reduced, risk of wildfire would decrease, and an increase in favorable habitat for fire-adapted and fire-dependent vegetation species would occur.

TES (Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Wildlife Species) –Extensive field surveys were conducted within the project area in all areas proposed for treatment. Four TES species were documented within the project area. These include three plant species (Ozark Chinquapin, Southern lady’s slipper, and small-headed pipewort) and one mammal species (Gray bat). Twelve species were not seen during field surveys, but possibly occur in the analysis area based on habitat observed or the field surveys were conducted when the species is not recognizable: one bird species (bald eagle), 3 mammal species (Ozark big-eared bat, gray bat, and Eastern Small-footed bat), 1 isopod species (Lirceus isopod), and 7 plant species (Ouachita leadplant, Bush’s poppymallow, French’s Shooting star, ovate-leaf catchfly, Moore’s larkspur, Ozark spiderwort, and Nuttall’s cornsalad).

Three aquatic species are known to occur downstream of the project area, but outside identified geographic bounds of water resource cumulative effects analysis area (defined as a point below which sediment amounts are immeasurable and insignificant). Species with OAR code “7” include: Longnose darter, William’s crayfish, and Nearctic paduniellan caddisfly.

A “may effect - not likely to adversely affect” determination was made for all potential endangered or threatened species utilizing the project area. Concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was obtained for these determinations. In addition, the Biological Evaluation (BE) for the project area determined that there are no foreseeable activities in the area that will directly or indirectly affect the viability of sensitive species found in the project area, or cause additive or synergistic adverse cumulative impacts in conjunction with the proposed projects. Planned actions will not have a negative effect on sensitive plant species. Protection measures defined in the Land and Resources Management Plan will be implemented and will provide protection for all known TES species.

Human Health – Risk of injury to forest workers performing the various tasks necessary to remove or manipulate the vegetation by using cutting tools (usually chainsaws) is possible. Manual application of handtools and herbicides using direct stem/stump treatment for actions such as site preparation and creating wildlife openings provides opportunities for worker injuries from cutting tools and exposure to herbicide. Proper procedures for worker and public safety will be followed and the risk for on- and off-site health hazards will be very low. Mitigation measures for herbicides in EA pp. 18-19 will be applied, even extended (see page 12 of this document, 3rd para.) and monitoring will be implemented. Mitigation measures to be employed greatly reduce the chance of workers being exposed and ensure risks for any public exposure remain slight. Removal of dead and dying trees through harvest and thinning operations will make the area safer for forest visitors. When implementing prescribed fire, all precautions are taken to avoid damage to private property and minimize risk to worker and public health as per site specific burn plans, smoke management guidelines, standard fire safety guidelines and job hazard analyses. No significant short-term, long-term, or cumulative effects to human health are anticipated.

Economic/Social – Gross timber sale receipts are estimated at \$714,611.00. Annually, a portion of the gross National Forest receipts are returned to Arkansas to be distributed to the counties containing the public forests. An additional 10% of the gross receipts are also available to the Ozark National Forest to be used to improve watershed conditions at sites across the forest based on priority needs each year. Contracts for site preparation, wildlife habitat improvement, road work, and other treatments will also add benefits to the local economy. Implementation of the selected alternative will have a positive effect on the local economy in that it will provide revenue to the counties/schools and provide local jobs while at the same time improving ecosystem health in the project area. Long-term or cumulative effects on the social and economic factors are predicted to be non-significant.

Management Areas, Aesthetics, and Recreation – Timber harvest, thinning, TSI/PCT and prescribed burning will allow views which penetrate into the stands (further than the existing near foreground) giving the stands a more park-like appearance and providing for a greater diversity of understory species. Area visitors will see and smell smoke during burning, see blackened trees and ground for the first season until the next spring green-up, see some browning of vegetation from harvest activities during the initial work in stands along county and forest roads.

Currently, there is a designated OHV route in the Pea Prong project area. It is a loop route consisting of roads 1540, 94461A & B, and 94462A & B. These roads will be used to access harvest areas. Signs will be posted during timber activities notifying OHV users to avoid this area. This will only be a temporary inconvenience.

Planned activities will have some short-term effects on aesthetics and recreational users may suffer temporary inconveniences from the implementation of planned work. No significant long-term or cumulative effects on these aesthetic and recreation resources are anticipated. Implementation of the selected alternative will have no long-term negative effects or cumulative negative effects.

Other alternatives considered in detail were:

Alternative 1. No Action:

Analysis of this alternative measured the effects of not implementing the proposed ecosystem restoration, wildlife and associated vegetation management actions on the physical, biological, human health, and economic and social components of the environment. Only custodial management such as road maintenance, fire control and law enforcement would occur. Implementation of this alternative would not allow for the restoration of ecosystem health and creating sustainable forest ecosystem conditions through thinning and regeneration treatments and restoration of the fire regime mimicking historic/natural fire-return intervals. Implementation of this alternative would not increase plant and wildlife diversity. Habitat for early successional/disturbance-dependent species would not be improved. Historic ecosystems of oak forest would not be maintained for vegetation and wildlife. Implementation of this alternative

would not reduce forest fuels and not reduce risk to forest ecosystems and private property. Implementation of this alternative would not reduce conflicts between motorized vehicle use and other resource values. Implementation of this alternative would not increase or improve recreational uses on the Forest. Implementation of this alternative would not improve Forest visitor safety. No direct revenues to the federal or county treasuries would occur from the sale of commodities and no employment opportunities would be generated. The objectives of the LRMP for wildlife and timber would not be met.

Alternative 2, the original Proposed Action:

This alternative differs from Alternative 3 in the amount of acres of daily burning (3000-4000 ac). Additionally, there would be foliar herbicide use for this alternative. All other treatments, their locations and sizes, are the same as Alternative 3.

Alternative 3, the Selected Alternative:

This alternative was developed in response to public comments which relate to the use of prescribed fire and herbicides and their perceived effects upon the environment and human health. Prescribed fire would be utilized for the purposes of fuel reduction, silvicultural treatment, and wildlife habitat improvement in stands, but only in 1,500-acre increments. Herbicide application by the foliar method would not be used, but would be replaced by mechanical and/or handtool methods. Generally, handtools are not as effective for vegetation manipulation as herbicides; therefore, more applications may be required in this alternative.

With implementation of Alternative 3, the same number of acres in the proposed action could potentially be burned; however, the District would be limited to 1,500 acres per day, thereby reducing smoke output; still, the District will have to burn more days because smaller areas would be burned. Burning larger land areas reduces the number of days needed to burn. Because natural barriers (such as ephemeral/perennial streams and man-made barriers such as roads and powerlines) as fire-breaks wouldn't always be available for use when burning the smaller blocks of land, additional dozer lines would need to be constructed. However, if consent is given from private landowners to burn their land in conjunction with National Forest land, man-made barriers could be used as fire-breaks and could possibly reduce the amount of fire-line needed to be constructed.

My reasons for choosing **Alternative 3** were:

Overall, I viewed this proposal as the one best meeting the goals and objectives of the LRMP while still addressing the issues and concerns raised by the public, other agencies, and by the interdisciplinary team. Specifically, the reasons are:

- The selected alternative, as mitigated, addressed the issue of prescribed burning and its effects on air quality for nearby residents and visitors. The normal burning procedure is to control burn as many acres (3,000-4000 ac.) as possible because the helicopter and specialized personnel are available for only a certain amount of days and the hourly operation is costly. Alternative 3 will spread out the burn days, but

will shorten the duration of each burn (therefore, its intensity) so that impacts to residents are lessened.

Prescribed fire can be a useful practice for several purposes. Prescribed fire would serve to reintroduce fire into a fire-adapted ecosystem, promote oak regeneration in shelterwood harvest areas, maintain pine/hardwood stands in open conditions, increase herbaceous understory species density and diversity, increase soft-mast production and reduce potentially hazardous accumulations of fuels on the forest floor. There should be no long-term or cumulative effects to the human or physical environment from the planned actions.

- Use of herbicides continues to be a concern for many people. Concerns regarding harmful effects to humans, plants and animals from herbicide residues in water are the primary issue. The proposed action contains the potential use of herbicide on approximately 4,220 acres for site preparation, thinning, TSI/PCT, NNIS control, and creation of early-seral habitat in wildlife openings. I decided that the selection of Alternative 3 was acceptable because it balanced reasonable use of herbicide while addressing the concerns of our Forest neighbors. The effects analysis in the EA shows that, with mitigation measures in place, herbicides can be a safe, cost-effective, and an efficient tool to accomplish most of the work. However, only stem-injection or stump-application methods for herbicide will be used. Handtools will be employed to reduce smaller competition. Two or more handtool applications may have to be used, but this method will eliminate any concern regarding non-target areas being affected by herbicide application.

In addition, where it states in the EA, pp. 18-19, under 2. HERBICIDES, letter “d.” “Herbicides will not be applied within 30 feet of any spring or stream, or within 50 feet of any perennial stream.” I have decided to extend the buffer zone to 100 feet of a spring, stream, or perennial stream where no herbicide will be applied.

Overall, there will be no significant short-term harmful effects to humans, TES species, or wildlife, and no significant long-term or cumulative effects from the planned herbicide/handtool use.

- With implementation of Alternative 3, approximately 1,165 acres would be converted, through harvest and subsequent regeneration, from the 81-100 year age classes to the 0-10 year age class. Browse and early-successional forest habitat would be provided in these regeneration areas for a variety of wildlife species. Viability of disturbance-dependent avian species would be enhanced. Avian species requiring both large and small areas of early-successional vegetation and forest edge would benefit. Implementation of this alternative will result in a 12% reduction of interior forest habitat which is greater than 81 years old (within project area compartments). Following implementation of this alternative, 77% of the forested land base within the project area compartments would remain in the 81-100+ year age classes. When considering

recruitment of stands into the 61+ year age classes in the next 1-20 years, and examination of distribution of stand age classes, fragmentation of interior forest habitat is not anticipated. Determination of effects to TES species is disclosed in the EA on pages 64-69. These determinations and concurrence from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicate viability of TES species found in the project area will not be compromised. Wildlife habitat is affected by the planned activities of Alternative 3 in an overall positive manner.

- Alternative 3 will provide acceptable economic benefits. This alternative will provide a positive effect on the local economy by providing forest products, government revenues, and job opportunities.
- When implemented, Alternative 3 will be monitored through timber sale inspections, regeneration surveys, water quality monitoring, and other actions listed in the mitigation measures on pgs. 18-20 of the EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS (FONSI):

Based on my review of the above analysis and from past experience, I have determined that the proposed actions are not a major Federal action either individually or cumulatively, and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary. This determination is based on the following factors (40 CFR 1508.27):

1. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered and this action should not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (EA, pp. 23-78).
2. The actions should not affect public health or safety (EA, pp. 73-75).
3. The project will not significantly affect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, ecologically critical areas, or wild and scenic rivers (EA, pp. 49-50, 56-69, 73-78).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, pp. 23-78).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, pp. 23-78).
6. The actions in this decision will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

7. There will be no cumulatively significant impacts on the environment. The cumulative effects of the proposed actions have been analyzed with consideration of other similar activities on adjacent lands, in past actions, and in foreseeable future actions (EA, pp. 23-78).
8. The actions will not affect any sites listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places nor will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA, pp. 49-50).
9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened plant or animal species, or their critical habitat (EA, pp. 64-69).
10. None of the actions threaten to lead to violation of federal, state, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment (EA, pp. 23-78).

For water quality management, State Best Management Practices (BMPs), which are incorporated into the mitigation measures, will be used for this project (EA, pp. 18-20). These BMPs have been designed with the goal of producing water that meets state water quality standards. The project will be monitored to ensure BMPs are implemented. If implementing BMPs on a specific site results in effects significantly higher than anticipated because of unforeseen site factors or events, appropriate corrective measures will be considered and implemented.

Actions are also consistent with the Antiquities Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations. Additionally, the best available scientific data was used when selecting and analyzing the effects of the proposed action.

OTHER FINDINGS:

1. The actions of the project are consistent with the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests LRMP goals and objectives (Revised-2005). All of the actions associated with this project occur in the General Forest Area Management Areas: Ozark Highlands Trail (2.A.), Mixed Forest (3.C.), High Quality Forest Products (3.E.), and Riparian Corridors (3.I.). All of the planned actions associated with these projects are consistent with the management prescriptions and management practices for the Management Areas. The actions are also consistent with the LRMP because mitigation measures for impacts shall be fully applied in implementation. The project is feasible and reasonable, restores ecosystem health, protects the environment while producing goods and services.
2. The actions of this project comply with the ecological, social, and economic requirements of 36 CFR 219.19 by following the Forest-wide standards and guides.

These actions also meet the General Management requirements and Mitigation Measures in the ROD of the FEIS of the Vegetation Management in the Ozark/Ouachita Mountains. The requirements met are:

1. The activities chosen are best suited for the multiple-use goals of the area.
2. All practices prescribed for timber harvest areas will maintain adequate stocking for the area now and in the future. Areas selected for shelterwood harvest are mature stands of trees, have good seed-producing qualities, and are situated on suitable soils for natural regeneration.
3. Alternative 3 was not selected solely based upon the output of timber. This alternative provides a positive effect on the local economy, forest health, recreation and wildlife and has only minimal short-term effects on other resources.
4. The activities chosen will not adversely affect residual trees in adjacent stands.
5. The activities chosen, with mitigating measures, avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and ensure conservation of soil and water resources.
6. The activities provide for meeting LRMP objectives for all resources.
7. The activities are practical in terms of transportation and harvesting and total cost of site preparation, logging, and administration.

IMPLEMENTATION:

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.7. A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published (**October 3, 2012**) in the *Johnson County GRAPHIC*. The Notice of Appeal should be sent to: USDA, Forest Service, Southern Region, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 1720 Peachtree Road, NW, Suite 811N, Atlanta, Georgia 30309 or electronically at:

appeals-southern-ozark-stfrancis@fs.fed.us

Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. For further information on this decision, contact me at: Pleasant Hill Ranger District, 2591 Hwy 21, Clarksville, AR 72830.

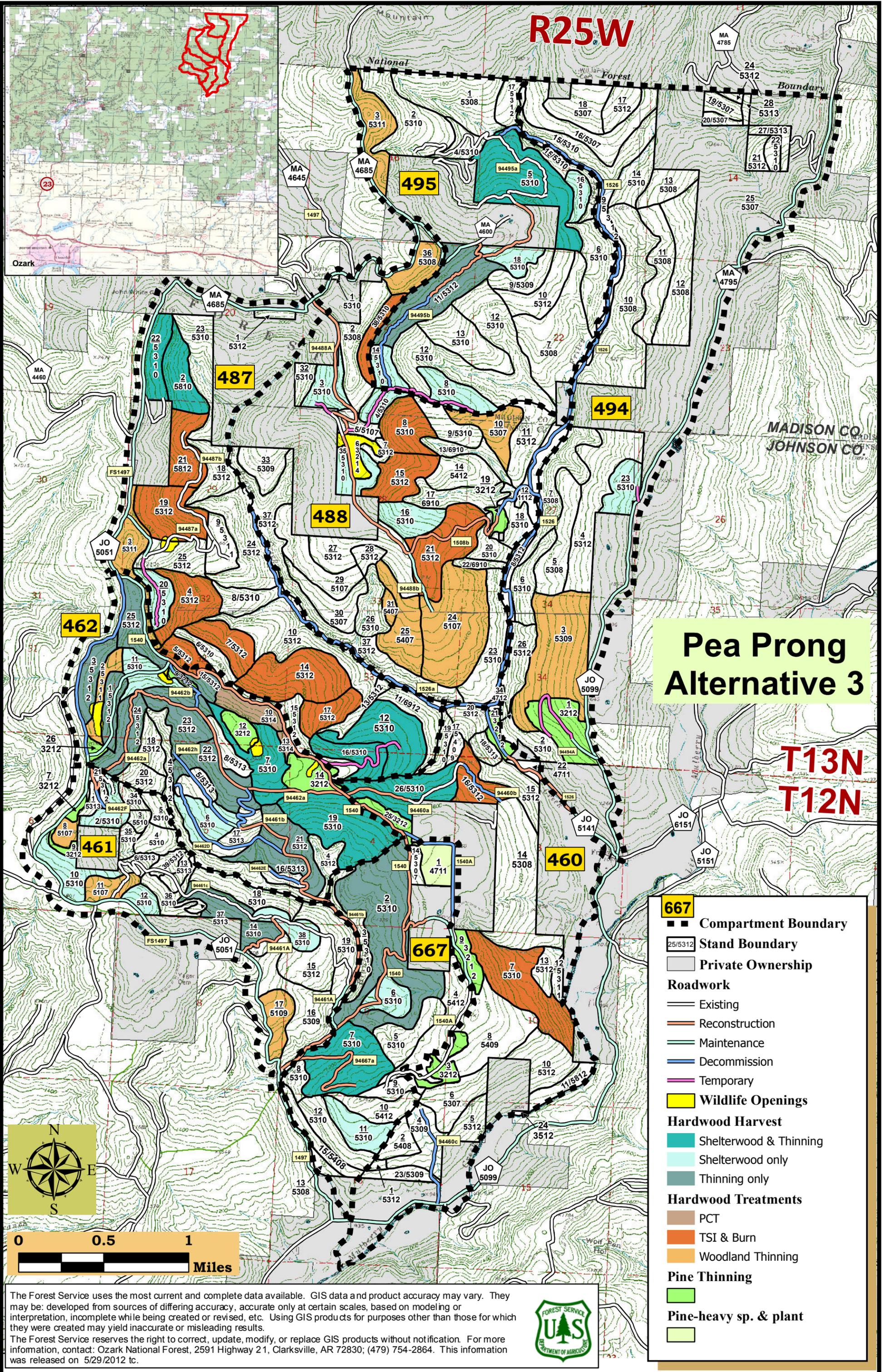
If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur in, but not less than, 5 business days after the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition. Only those who have provided substantive comments regarding the proposed action during the scoping and/or EA comment period can be accepted as appellants.

/s/ Pat Kowalewycz
PAT KOWALEWYCZ
District Ranger

Sept. 28, 2012

Date

encl
tc



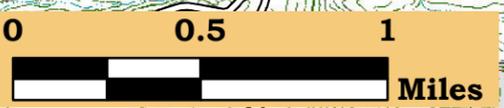
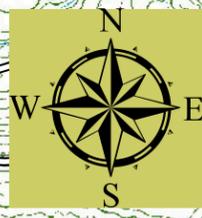
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MADISON CO.
JOHNSON CO.

**Pea Prong
Alternative 3**

T13N
T12N

- 667** ■ ■ **Compartment Boundary**
- 25/5312 **Stand Boundary**
- **Private Ownership**
- Roadwork**
- Existing
- Reconstruction
- Maintenance
- Decommission
- Temporary
- **Wildlife Openings**
- Hardwood Harvest**
- Shelterwood & Thinning
- Shelterwood only
- Thinning only
- Hardwood Treatments**
- PCT
- TSI & Burn
- Woodland Thinning
- Pine Thinning**
-
- Pine-heavy sp. & plant**
-



The Forest Service uses the most current and complete data available. GIS data and product accuracy 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: Ozark National Forest, 2591 Highway 21, Clarksville, AR 72830; (479) 754-2864. This information was released on 5/29/2012 tc.

