

**DECISION NOTICE
AND
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**USDA Forest Service R-8
Ozark National Forest
Mt. Magazine Ranger District
Yell County, Arkansas**

**COMPARTMENTS 1, 14, 55, and 56
PRAIRIE PROJECT**

An environmental assessment (EA) is available for public review in the district office in Paris, Arkansas, for the Prairie Project. This document, which was prepared by an interdisciplinary team (ID Team), discusses a proposed timber harvest and connected actions of reforestation, road activities, stream habitat management, and wildlife habitat improvement.

These actions are needed to contribute to the goals and objectives outlined in the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Ozark - St. Francis National Forests (RLRMP), and helps move the project area towards desired conditions described in the RLRMP. The primary objectives for this area are:

- Maintain or enrich forest vigor by reducing tree stocking. Reduced tree stocking would promote vigor by decreasing the overall demand for water and nutrients by residual vegetation. Trees with adequate water and nutrient supplies are able to withstand drought and are less likely to succumb to attacks by insects or disease.
- Provide viability needs in early seral successional habitat (0-5 years old).
- Allow salvage of damaged trees across the project area created by events such as drought, wind events, ice storms, beetle infestations, or diseases.
- Continue the process of balancing age classes and forest health.
- Lessen the possibility of catastrophic wildland fires (especially in drought years) by reducing the amount of burnable fuels, increase forage production of grasses and forbs for wildlife, and maintain native ecosystems that are dependent on periodic fires.
- Provide quality wildlife.
- Reduce impacts to wildlife and limit erosion potential on certain roads not needed for management in the near future throughout the project area.
- Provide forest products consistent with land capability, suitability, protection of needs, and other resource values.
- Control invasive species in the project area.
- Provide stream habitat management.
- Allow salvage/sanitation thinning to areas within close proximity to Spring Lake for safety, forest health or public utilization of downed trees.

The Prairie project area contains approximately 4595 acres of National Forest Land. This area is included in four different management areas. They are as follows:

- Management Area 2.C. (Developed Recreation Areas) - described on pages 2-50 to 2-52 of the RLRMP; emphasis is to provide the public with a variety of recreational opportunities in visually appealing and environmentally healthy settings.

- Management Area 3.A. (Pine Woodland) - described on pages 2-56 to 2-58 of the RLRMP; emphasis is to restore and maintain a landscape mosaic of open pine woodland that approximates historical conditions.
- Management Area 3.C. (Mixed Forest) - described on pages 2-61 to 2-62 of the RLRMP; emphasis is to manage these lands to ensure the health and sustainability of the pine, pine/hardwood, hardwood/pine, and hardwood forest types across the landscape.
- Management Area 3.I (Riparian Corridors) – described on pages 2-71 to 2-76 of the RLRMP; emphasis is retain, restore and enhance the inherent ecological processes and functions of the associated aquatic, riparian, upland components within the corridors.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND SCOPING

Scoping for this project began with the mailing of the proposed action to adjacent landowners and interested citizens on December 3, 2012. This list included letters to eight Native American Tribes and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. The scoping package contained a description of the proposed action, a map depicting the proposed action, and a comment form. A total of 55 letters were mailed.

A copy of the proposed action letter was posted that same week on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/detail/osfnf/landmanagement/planning>.

This project was also listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions and posted on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests website at http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5291930.pdf.

The ID Team also received this scoping.

Four public responses were received from this scoping effort. Three of the responses were either favorable or had no objection, one of them being from a Native American tribe. The fourth letter objected to forest management.

The EA was sent out for a 30-day comment period on May 31, 2013, pursuant to CFR 215.3. A copy of the EA was posted that same week on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark/projects/planning/magproject.html>.

One letter with comments was received from the public during this comment period.

DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION

Based on the results of the analysis documented in the EA, it is my decision to implement Alternative 1 along with Mitigation Measures described on pages 27-32 of the EA. Table 1 shows the activities in Alternative 1. Maps are attached to this decision showing these actions.

An estimated 45,793 CCF (Hundred Cubic Feet) of pine, hardwood, and cedar sawtimber and roundwood will be harvested. The combined present value of direct revenue generated from the timber harvest and the indirect revenue generated by habitat management for wildlife is estimated at approximately \$1,263,881. The present value of costs due to silvicultural and wildlife habitat management activities is estimated at approximately \$861,780. The net present value resulting from the proposed activities of Alternative 1 is approximately \$402,101.

The timber sales, which will accomplish the timber harvesting, are scheduled to begin FY 2016. Following completion of harvest activities in FYs 2016-2022, site preparation and other silvicultural activities will be scheduled from FYs 2017-2025. Rehabilitation of temporary roads will occur after all activities are completed. Wildlife habitat improvement activities will be scheduled from 2017-2027.

Table 2: Summary of Alternative 1 Actions^[1]

<p>SHORTLEAF PINE SHELTERWOOD HARVESTING</p>	<p>378 Acres 7233 CCF <i>C-1/Stand 22 and 23</i> <i>C-14/Stand 16 and 22</i> <i>C-55/Stand 8, 12, and 16</i></p>
<p>SHORTLEAF PINE SITE PREPARATION Handtools/Chemical/Prescribed Burning</p>	<p>378 Acres <i>C-1/Stand 22 and 23</i> <i>C-14/Stand 16 and 22</i> <i>C-55/Stand 8, 12, and 16</i></p>
<p>SHORTLEAF PINE PLANTING Handtools</p>	<p>378 Acres <i>C-1/Stand 22 and 23</i> <i>C-14/Stand 16 and 22</i> <i>C-55/Stand 8, 12, and 16</i></p>
<p>SHORTLEAF PINE RELEASE Handtools/Chemical</p>	<p>633 Acres <i>C-1/Stand 7, 22, and 23</i> <i>C-14/Stand 16, 22, and 24</i> <i>C-55/Stand 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 18</i></p>
<p>SHORTLEAF PINE/LOBLOLLY PINE THINNING</p>	<p>2683 Acres 29,850 CCF <u><i>Thin to 50 BA</i></u> <i>C-14/Stand 1, 7, 10, 14, 15, 19, 20, and 21</i> <i>C-56/Stand 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 15</i> <u><i>Thin to 60 BA</i></u> <i>C-1/Stand 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, part of 9, 17, 20</i> <i>C-55/Stand 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 17, and 23</i> <u><i>Thin to 70 BA</i></u> <i>C-1/Stand 13</i> <i>C-56/Stand 4 and 6</i></p>
<p>CEDAR THINNING</p>	<p>4,516 Acres Up to 450 acres per year <i>C-1/All Stands</i> <i>C-14/All Stands</i> <i>C-55/All Stands</i> <i>C-56/All Stands</i></p>
<p>SHORTLEAF PINE SEEDTREE REMOVAL</p>	<p>457 Acres 4194 CCF <i>C-14/Stand 24</i> <i>C-55/Stand 18</i></p>

^[1] All acres, miles, and volumes are approximations

Table 2. Summary of Alternative 1 Actions, continued^[1]

TEMPORARY ROAD CONSTRUCTION	15.7 Miles <i>C-1, 14, 55, 56</i>
ROAD CONSTRUCTION	0.6 Miles FDR 96001E
ROAD RECONSTRUCTION	11.0 Miles Portions of FDR 1625, 1632, 1632C, 1640, 1640A, 96014B, and Spring Lake Road (1602)
ROAD DECOMMISSIONING	5.2 Miles Portions of FDR 1625A, 1632A, 1632B, 1639, 96014A, 96014B, 96055D, 96055F and 96055G
ROAD MAINTENANCE	4.2 Miles Portions of FDR 1618A, 1632C, 1639, and 96001C
NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES TREATMENT Handtools/Chemical	Up to 700 acres/year <i>C-1/All Stands</i> <i>C-14/All Stands</i> <i>C-55/All Stands</i> <i>C-56/All Stands</i>
WILDLIFE OPENING CONSTRUCTION/RESTORATION^[2]	8 Openings <i>C-1/Stand 18</i> <i>C-14/Stands 1, 7, 8, and 25</i> <i>C-55/Stand 15</i> <i>C-56/Stand 12 (2x)</i>
WILDLIFE OPENING RESTORATION^[2]	3 Openings <i>C-1/Stands 4, 17</i> <i>C-55/Stand 5</i>
WILDLIFE STAND IMPROVEMENT/RIPARIAN STAND IMPROVEMENT	557 Acres <i>C-1/Stands 15, 16, 18, and 19</i> <i>C-14/Stands 2, 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, and 17</i> <i>C-56/Stands 8, 13, and 14</i>
LINEAR FOOD PLOT	4.0 Acres <i>FDRs 1632B, 1639, and 96014B</i>

^[1] Acres and miles are approximations

^[2] Proposed for three restoration treatments on a two-year rotation

Table 2. Summary of Alternative 1 Actions, continued^[1]

STREAM HABITAT IMPROVEMENT	<p>13 Miles C1/Stand 1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 22, and 23 C14/Stand 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 C55/Stand 4, 6, 7, 16 C56/Stand 2, 8, 12, and 13</p>
AQUATIC ORGANISM PASSAGE CONSTRUCTION	<p>2 Passages C-14/Stand 3 and 12</p>
LAKE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT-FISH STRUCTURES	<p>Up to 50 in Spring Lake</p>
OHV TRAIL ADDITION	<p>3.4 Miles FDR 1632, 1632C, 96001F</p>
WILDLIFE HABITAT IMPROVEMENT/ FUELS REDUCTION PRESCRIBED BURNING^[2]	<p>4514 Acres C-1/All Stands C-14/All Stands except 18^[3] if possible. C-55/All Stands C-56/All Stands</p> <p><i>The following 378 acres would be excluded during the first burning rotation after harvest but are expected to be planned for burning in subsequent rotations</i></p> <p>C-1/Stand 22 and 23 C-14/Stand 16 and 22 C-55/Stand 8, 12, and 16</p>
SALVAGE AROUND SPRING LAKE	<p>173 Acres C-1/Stand 10, 11 and 12 C-1/Portions of stand 9, 13, and 19</p>
SALVAGE ACROSS THE PROJECT AREA	<p>4343 Acres All acres in the Project Area except those within the Spring Lake salvage acres.</p>

^[1] Acres and miles are approximations

^[2] Proposed for three treatments for burning on a three to four-year rotation.

^[3] C14/Stand 18 is covered for burning in the event of unintended ignition. Research scientists prefer that no management activities take place within this stand if possible.

Alternative 1 with its mitigating measures was selected because it best addressed the purpose and need in a balanced, cost effective way providing for a high level of resource outputs that can be maintained in perpetuity without harming land productivity. My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. Analysis shows it:

1. Provides for healthy forests by thinning (EA; pp. 68-69).
2. Provides for early successional habitat (EA, pp. 67 and 73).
3. Begins to balance age classes (EA, p. 67).
4. Reduces amount of burnable fuels and increases forage production (EA, pp. 69 and 74).
5. Provides enhanced wildlife habitat through openings (EA, pp. 69, 74).
6. Closes roads not needed for management in the near future (EA, pp. 60, 61, 69, and 76).
7. Provides commodities (EA, p. 15).
8. Provides for control of invasive species (EA, p. 70).
9. Provides woody material for identified streams (EA, p. 80).

Alternative 2 does not provide these resource outputs.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

One alternative to the selected alternative was developed and analyzed. It was Alternative 2, a no action alternative. No timber harvest and connected actions of reforestation, road activities, stream habitat management, and wildlife habitat improvement would occur.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

All actions of Alternative 1 are consistent with the RLRMP and other applicable laws as follows:

1. The actions of this project are consistent with the RLRMP Vision, Strategy, and Design Criteria. The actions of this project occur in Management Area 2.C (Developed Recreation Areas), Management Area 3.A (Pine Woodland), Management Area 3.C (Mixed Forest), and Management Area 3.I (Riparian Corridor). The actions in Alternative 1 are consistent with the RLRMP because they meet the standards and guidelines, and mitigation measures for environmental impacts have been fully applied in the planned actions. These mitigation measures include both monitoring and evaluation of planned actions. The project is feasible and reasonable, and it results in applying management practices that meet the RLRMP's overall direction of protecting the environment while producing goods and services (EA, pp. 27-32).
2. All actions of this project harvest timber on those lands the RLRMP identifies as suitable for timber production (RLRMP, pp. 2-56, 2-61, and 2-72; EA, pp. 9, 10 and 61). (See 36 CFR 219.15 for definition).
3. I have determined for the present even-aged stands of Compartment 1/Stand 22, 23; Compartment 14/Stand 16, 22; and Compartment 55/Stand 8, 12 and 16 that the shelterwood harvest method is the appropriate method to meet the RLRMP objectives and requirements. Based on the site-specific analysis of the proposal, the discussions of silvicultural systems and their harvest cutting methods in Appendix B of the FEIS of the RLRMP are applicable to the forest conditions in these compartments.

Shelterwood cutting is appropriate as follows:

- a. Utilizes the seed source already in place that will provide adequate stocking (EA, p. 67).
- b. Provides early successional habitat and provides for diversity in the lower age classes on approximately 378 acres in seven areas (EA; pp. 67, 73).

- c. Shelterwood cutting is generally accepted in research literature on silviculture as being an appropriate regeneration harvest cutting method for shortleaf pine when establishment of an even-aged stand is the desired future condition (EA, p. 67).
4. I have determined that Alternative 1 complies with 36 CFR 219.28 (b) according to the following:
 - a. Is best suited to the multiple-use goals of the area with the potential environmental, biological, cultural resources, aesthetic, engineering and economic impacts, as stated in the regional guides and RLRMP, considered in this determination (EA, p. 31-92).
 - b. The lands harvested can be adequately restocked in 5 years except for permanent openings created for wildlife, roads, and similar purposes (EA, p. 67).
 - c. Is not selected because of its dollar return or output of timber although these factors were considered (EA; p. 91).
 - d. Is selected after considering the potential effects on remaining trees and adjacent stands (EA, pp. 67-70).
 - e. Is not permanently harmful to site productivity and ensures conservation of soil and water resources (EA, pp. 35-37 and 39-43).
 - f. Does provide desired effects on water quantity and quality, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired species, recreation uses, aesthetic values, and other resource yields (EA, pp. 39-43, 54-56, 67-70, 73-75, and 80-81).
 - g. Is practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements, and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration (EA; p. 91).

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

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 will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (EA, pp. 35-92).
2. The actions will not affect public health or safety (EA, pp. 85-89).
3. The project will not significantly affect any unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, wetlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas (EA; pp. 37-43, 56-58, 82-85).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial (EA, pp. 35-89).
5. The actions do not involve highly uncertain, unique, or unknown environmental risks to the human environment (EA, pp. 35-89).
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 (EA, pp. 35-89).
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. 35-89).

8. The actions will not affect any sites listed in, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places or will they cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources (EA, p. 58).
9. The actions are not likely to adversely affect endangered or threatened plant or animal species, or their critical habitat (EA, pp. 84-85).
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. 27-32).

For water quality management, state-approved Best Management Practices (BMPs), which are incorporated into the mitigation measures, will be used for this project. These BMPs are from the state water quality management plan, and have been designed with the goal of producing water that meets state water quality standards. The project will be monitored to insure 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. This project will fully comply with state approved BMPs and the Clean Water Act.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Appeals must meet requirements stated in 36 CFR 215.14 in order to be considered. When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant (215.2) and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request are required pursuant 215.14 (3). A written Notice of Appeal must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in *The Southwest Times*. The Notice of Appeal must be filed with: Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, 605 West Main, Russellville, AR 72801. Appeals may be faxed to (479) 964-7229. Hand-delivered appeals must be delivered to the Ozark St.-Francis Supervisors Office in Russellville pursuant 36CFR215.15(a) within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-ozark-stfrancis@fs.fed.us.

Appeals should not be filed with the Responsible Official at Paris, AR.

Who may appeal?

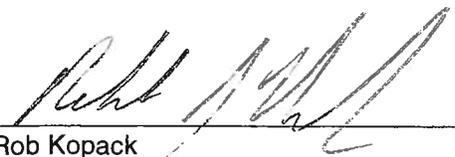
36 CFR 215.13 States that any person who submitted a substantive comment during the official 30 day comment period for an environmental assessment is eligible to file an appeal. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.9(a) when no appeal is filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period. (36 CFR 215.9 (b)) when an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of appeal disposition.

CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from me Rob Kopack, Deputy District Ranger, Mt. Magazine Ranger District, P.O. Box 511, Paris, AR 72855; (479) 973-3076; fax (479) 963-8055; e-mail: rkopack@fs.fed.us.

SIGNATURE AND DATE



Rob Kopack
Deputy District Ranger
Mt. Magazine Ranger District

6-14-13

Date

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