



File Code: 1950
Date: September 30, 2013

SCOPING NOTICE REQUESTING COMMENT ON THE SYLAMORE RANGE ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT PROJECT

I am inviting you to submit comments to help refine the proposed activities for the *Sylamore Range Allotment Management Project*. An environmental analysis is being prepared and I am interested in your thoughts regarding any issues, concerns, or opportunities related to this proposal. Please note that neither private lands nor the rights of private land owners will be affected.

Pursuant to 36 CFR 218.7(a)(2), this proposed project implements 2005 Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/osfnf/landmanagement/planning>) direction for these areas and is subject to §218 subparts A and B.

Where are we proposing to act?

The project area consists of six (6) separate range allotments located on National Forest System lands located in Stone and Baxter Counties, AR as shown in Table 1 and on the attached map.

Table 1: Proposed Project Areas for the Sylamore Range Allotment Management Project

Allotment	Acres/ Allotment *	Management Area (MA) and acres/MA *	Location
Nature #16	34	MA 1.C: 34 acres	T. 15N, R. 11W, Section 11 in Stone County
Middleton #17	27	MA 1.H: 16 acres MA 3.C: 11 acres	T. 16N, R. 11W, Section 36 in Stone County
Landers #18	48	MA 1.H: 17 acres MA 3.C: 15 acres MA 3.J: 16 acres	T. 16N, R. 13W, Sections 19 and 20 in Stone County
Dorsey #19	490	MA 3.C: 264 acres MA 3.J: 226 acres	T. 16N, R. 10W, Sections 5, 6, 8, 9 and 17 in Stone County
White River #20	81	MA 3.C: 34 acres MA 3.J: 47 acres	T. 18N, R. 13W, Sections 19 and 20 in Baxter County
Bonanza #21	21	MA 3.C: 2 acres MA 3.J: 19 acres	T. 18N, R. 14W, Section 24 and T. 18N, R. 13W, Section 19 in Baxter County
Total Acres	701		

*Acres have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Management Areas descriptions are found in the Forest Plan as follows:

MA 1.C: Designated Wild and Scenic Rivers (Scenic): [Forest Plan, pages 2-35 through 2-37]

MA 1.H: Scenic Byway Corridors [Forest Plan, pages 2-45 and 2-46]



MA 3.C: Mixed Forest[Forest Plan, pages 2-61 and 2-62]

MA 3.J: Pastures and Large Wildlife Openings[Forest Plan, pages 2-76 and 2-77]

The Nature #16 Allotment is adjacent to North Sylamore Creek; Middleton #17 and Landers #18 are adjacent to Livingston Creek and the remaining allotments occur alongside the White River.

Why are we proposing this project?

Current and Desired Conditions

The desired conditions for range (Forest Plan, page 1-48) are:

- ❖ Permanent pastures provide optimal forage for wildlife species that benefit from early successional conditions or a mixture of habitat conditions, and
- ❖ Livestock grazing occurs on some of the pastures to help maintain desired conditions.

Fields are assigned to Management Area 3.J.: *Pastures and Large Wildlife Openings*. Forest Plan direction for these areas is provided on pages 2-76, 2-77, 3-37 and 3-38, and it includes:

- ❖ maintaining pastures in a grass/forb condition with little woody encroachment;
- ❖ converting exotic, improved pasture (Bermuda and fescue) to native grasses as opportunities and budgets allow;
- ❖ ensuring soil productivity is maintained and optimum forage is provided;
- ❖ reducing invasive species and species of poor forage quality, and
- ❖ ensuring grazing does not negatively impact soil, riparian areas, stream banks or channels.

Due to issues in recent years with access and difficulties in providing reliable water sources for cattle, grazing has been discontinued on all but field number one (1) of the Dorsey #19 allotment.

Currently the allotments are maintained through actions that include fertilizing, liming, disking, seeding, mowing, prescribed burning and herbicide applications; constructed ponds are maintained as needed; grazing through permit is utilized on one (1) field and hay cultivation permits are utilized on seven (7) fields. Each allotment is comprised of mixed bermuda and fescue fields with some native grasses and forbs, and occasional inclusions of pine or mixed hardwood. Native river cane occurs at low densities on some of the fields. Forest-Wide Standard FW77 (Forest Plan, page 3-11) directs program managers to reestablish native cane species along streams and rivers.

Recent surveys and inspections indicate infestations of non-native invasive plants as well as shrubby encroachment around the margins of the fields. Almost all of the allotments have also sustained substantial damage from feral hogs.

Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to implement management actions that will

- ❖ maintain the fields of the District's six (6) range allotments in an open condition,
- ❖ improve forage quality,
- ❖ reduce non-native invasive plant infestations
- ❖ maintain soil productivity

What are we proposing?

Under this project current management activities will continue. In addition, damage caused by feral hogs, off-highway vehicles or pack animals will be repaired as it is discovered; a natural sinkhole (Hayden Bend Pond) will be protected from grazing cattle, populations of native river cane will be re-established; unauthorized roads and trails through allotments will be obliterated and authorized access roads will be maintained or realigned.

The proposal is designed to comply with all federal, state and local laws, regulations or requirements and the standards of the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan of the Ozark St. Francis National Forests (Forest Plan). The Forest Plan and its associated documents are posted on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests website.

The Proposed Action involves actions which will span multiple years; if the proposed action is selected for implementation, activities will tentatively be scheduled to begin in fiscal year 2014.

The management activities being proposed are as follows:

1. Actions Common to All Allotments:

On all six (6) allotments the following activities may be implemented individually or in combination as needed:

- ❖ mowing and/or brush-hogging;
 - ❖ discing, blading;
 - ❖ seeding/planting;
 - ❖ fertilizing and liming;
 - ❖ prescribed burning;
 - ❖ maintenance, repair, removal or construction of fencing;
 - ❖ maintenance or decommissioning of existing ponds;
 - ❖ maintenance or realignment of access roads;
 - ❖ obliteration of unauthorized roads or trails;
 - ❖ repairing damage caused by feral hogs, pack animals or motorized vehicles, and
 - ❖ herbicide applications to control invasive plants (native and non-native invasive species) competing with optimum forage species, and/or to remove encroachment of woody stems.
- The herbicides proposed for use are limited to glyphosate and triclopyr (amine and ester formulations);
 - Characteristics of these chemicals are discussed at length in their respective risk assessments which are available on the internet at www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/pesticide/risk.shtml:
 - SERA TR 052-22-03b and SERA TR-052-22-03a-App. Forest Health Protection. Glyphosate: Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment Final Report and Appendices
 - SERA TR 052-25-03a and SERA TR-052-25-03a-App. Forest Health Protection. Triclopyr: Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessment Final Report and Appendices.

- A citrus based surfactant or a vegetable oil carrier may be added to increase the efficacy of the applications.
- Herbicides, citrus based surfactant and/or vegetable oil based carrier will be administered at the lowest effective rate and according to the manufacturer's label specifications.
- Application methods may include cut surface, foliar spray or basal bark.
- Within Streamside Management Zones, only commercial formulations of glyphosate or triclopyr amine labeled for aquatic use will be applied to non-native invasive plants.
- Neither of these herbicides will be applied to any standing water, rivers or streams or within Karst Management Zones.
- Herbicide will not be applied directly to soil or aerially.
- All phases of herbicide use will be monitored to ensure the proper mixing, application and clean-up procedures are followed, and to determine the efficacy of applications.

2. *Permits*

Hay cultivation permits will continue to be issued or re-issued on most of the allotment fields except those of the Bonanza #21 and White River #20 allotments.

- ❖ Existing hay cultivation permits will not be affected by this project.

Grazing will continue to be used as a method to remove excess forage from Dorsey #19 field number one (62 acres) where up to 30 cow/calf pairs may be put on the permitted use area on a seasonal basis.

- ❖ The grazing permit includes requirements to implement a rest/rotation schedule to prevent over-grazing.

3. *Actions Specific to Each Allotment*

Nature #16

- ❖ Hay cultivation permits may be re-issued or issued to new permit holders on the remaining fields of this allotment.

Middleton #17

- ❖ Five (5) acres of the Middleton #17 allotment are designated as a seed orchard and will continue to be managed as such.
- ❖ Hay cultivation permits may be re-issued or issued to new permit holders on the remaining fields of this allotment.

Landers # 18

- ❖ Six (6) acres of the Landers #18 allotment are designated as a seed orchard and will continue to be managed as such.
- ❖ Hay cultivation permits may be re-issued or issued on the remaining fields of this allotment.

Dorsey #19:

- ❖ To protect the fencing from tree fall, a tree-length buffer will be created and maintained between the fence and wooded inclusions that surround the grazing permit area. Trees within 50-100 feet of the fence would be felled with chainsaws. Stumps of felled hardwoods will be treated with herbicide to prevent re-sprouting. The buffer will be maintained through the actions common to all allotments. The tree-length buffer will not be included as part of the area under grazing permit.
- ❖ To mitigate the potential for grazing animals to damage Hayden Bend Pond, a natural sinkhole, it will be fenced out. Riparian plant species will be planted between the fence and the sinkhole entrance.
- ❖ To respond to Forest-Wide standard FW77 native river cane rhizomes will be transplanted from the edges of the allotment to a 25 acre field where it will be allowed to expand until a monotypic population is established.
- ❖ Hay cultivation permits may be re-issued to existing permit holders or issued to new permit holders on the remaining four (4) fields of this allotment.

Bonanza #21 and White River #20

- ❖ To respond to Forest-Wide standard FW77 native river cane rhizomes will be transplanted from the edges of these allotments to the fields where it will be allowed to expand until monotypic populations are established.

Alternatives Currently Being Considered

Alternatives currently being considered for this project include 1) the No Action Alternative in which no new management activities would occur, and 2) the Proposed Action as described in this letter.

If any new issues related to the effects of implementing the proposed action are identified through the comments I receive in response to this request, it may be refined or another alternative may be developed.

Establishing Standing for Objection Eligibility

An objection period, if required, will follow the regulation found in §218.7 [<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-08-08/html/2012-19302.htm>]. All comments received on the proposal will be considered; however, only those who have submitted timely, specific written comments during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. To establish standing for objection eligibility, the designated opportunity for scoping comments to be received will be October 4 to November 4, 2013. A 30 day Notice and Comment period will be provided at a future date (§218.24).

Issues to be raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after a designated opportunity to comment (§218.8(c)).

How to Comment

Specific written comments as defined by §218.2 should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for me, as the Responsible Official, to consider. Please be aware that comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to notify the respondent when the environmental analysis is available or when the next designated opportunity for public comment occurs and will not give the commenter objection rights.

Specific written comments must be submitted to me: James R. McCoy, District Ranger, 1001 East Main, Mountain View, AR 72560, fax (870—269-3000), office (870-269-3228). The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 7:30 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc, .docx) to comments-southern-ozark-stfrancis-sylamore@fs.fed.us. Please state “[Sylamore Range Allotment Management]” in the subject line when providing electronic comments, or on the envelope when replying by mail.

If you have questions relating to this proposal or want more information about it, please contact Wildlife Biologist Jessica Hawkins by email [jessicamhawkins@fs.fed.us] or by phone [870-269-3228 extension 3233].

Thank you for your interest in the management of the Sylamore Ranger District.

Sincerely,

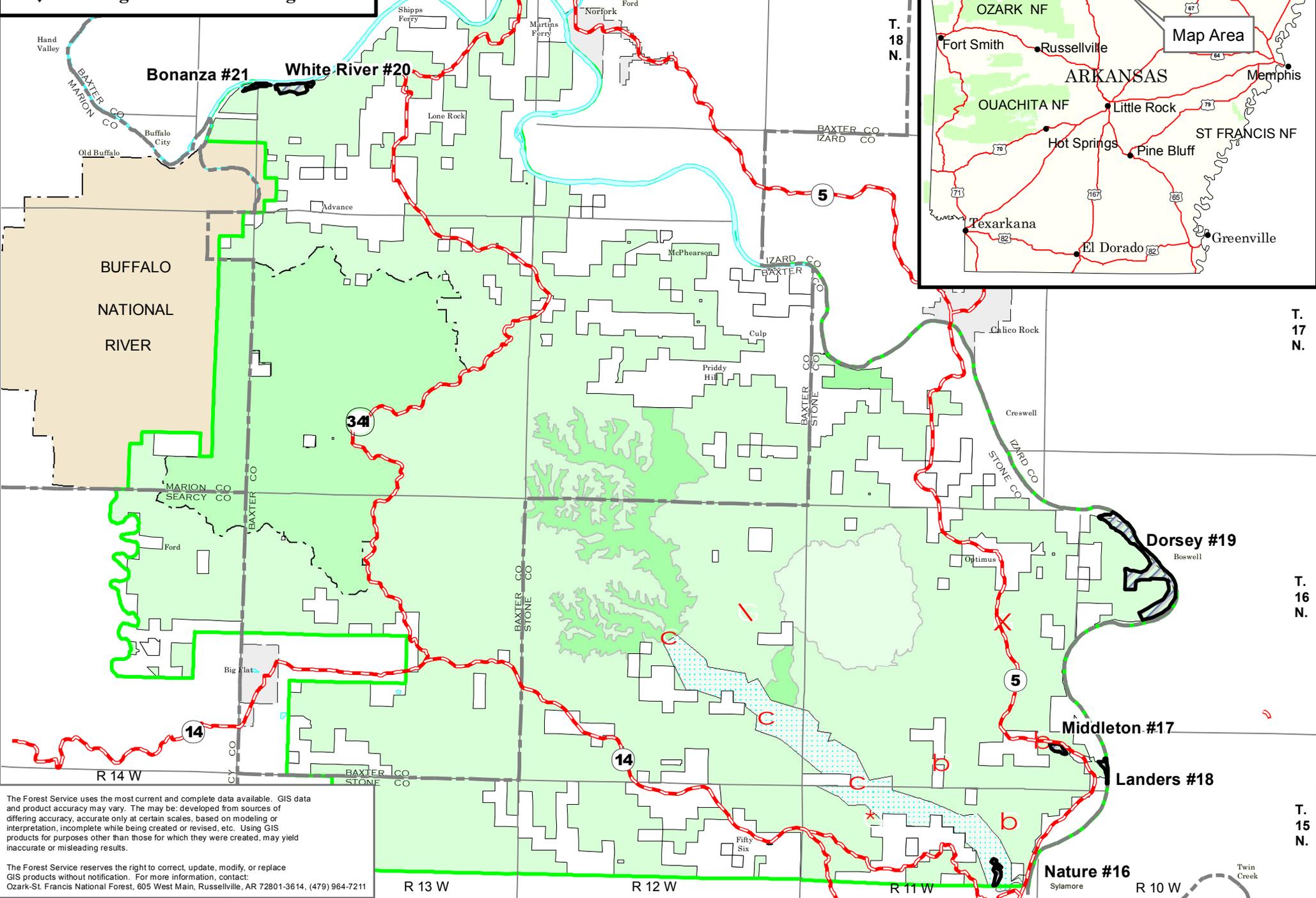
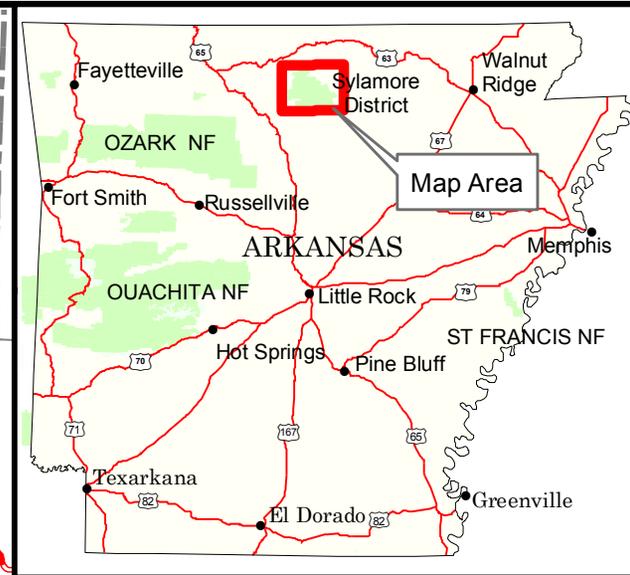
/s/ *James R. McCoy*

JAMES R. McCOY
District Ranger

attachment (1 vicinity map)
jlf



**Ozark-St. Francis National Forests
Sylamore Ranger District
Range Allotment Management**



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Ozark-St. Francis National Forest, 605 West Main, Russellville, AR 72801-3614, (479) 964-7211