



Decision Memo

Condro Prescribed Fire Project

USDA Forest Service
Hidden Springs Ranger District, Shawnee National Forest
Pope County, Illinois
T15S, R6E, Sec 3, 4

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2012 the Shawnee National Forest was approached by a private landowner who wanted to manage his land for the long-term maintenance of oak and hickory-dominated hardwood stands, but was concerned about potential erosion from firelines constructed on steeper slopes near national forest land. Since in the 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) the Shawnee National Forest adopted very similar natural resource goals for the area, the parties agreed to work together to move the project area towards the common desired conditions.

In February 2013 the Shawnee National Forest proposed to conduct a simultaneous, coordinated prescribed fire on about 72 acres of national forest land adjacent to the landowner's property. The landowner and the Southeastern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA), a landowner cooperative in which members assist each other in applying prescribed fire to their property, would plan, prepare, and conduct the prescribed fire on about 190 acres of private property. Planning, preparation, and firing of national forest land would be the responsibility of the Forest Service. The burn would be repeated as necessary.

The activity would include associated fire lines needed to contain the prescribed burns. A bulldozer would likely be used to skim off surface grasses and leaves on existing roads and skid trails on private land in the western side of the project area. Firelines would be constructed with leaf blowers and, where needed, hand tools on the slope down to the creek in the southwest corner of the unit (see project map). Existing creeks, roads, and trails comprise the remaining firelines. Cooperation between the parties would reduce the required fireline construction by 0.9 miles.

DECISION

In the absence of extraordinary circumstances associated with this proposal, it is my decision to implement this action as proposed with the following exception: The portion of the prescribed fire that was in the Burke Branch Research Natural area is to be excluded from the prescribed fire. Slight alterations in the placement of control lines are required but will follow the same methods proposed. This reduces the size of the burn on national forest land to about 65 acres.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA). The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as Category 6, or *Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than one mile of low standard road construction*. The manner of implementation and the anticipated environmental result on national forest lands would be typical of that experienced at other prescribed fire locations on the forest where fire is used to produce desirable stand conditions or habitat improvement.

In our analysis, I have found no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I have taken into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species: *Biological Evaluations conducted for federally listed plants and animals, and for Regional Forester Sensitive Species show no effect or not likely to adversely affect for all species.*
- Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds: *There are no municipal watersheds associated with this project. Any floodplains and wetlands are very small, and not anticipated to be impacted by erosion or sedimentation from the project.*
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas: *The project does not contain any such areas.*
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas: *While the project is in the Burke Branch Roadless Area, it does not require any new dozer lines or roads and only minimal maintenance of existing ones. New firelines on federal land will be leaf-blown, or where necessary hand-dug, and rehabilitated when the project is complete. The Roadless character of the area would be unaffected.*
- Research natural areas: *The project excludes the Burke Branch Research Natural Area.*
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites: *No such sites would be affected by the project.*
- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas: *Archeological surveys were conducted according to the programmatic agreement for prescribed fire with the State Historic Preservation Office. Impacts to any sites discovered are mitigated through avoidance or applying design criteria as required by the agreement.*

Several design criteria were recommended by specialists to prevent undue impacts to various resource areas. These are listed in the table below.

Resource Area	Design Criteria	Rationale / Effectiveness
Wildlife Resources	When it becomes necessary to cut/remove trees less than a 5 mile linear distance from any known Indiana bat hibernacula or maternity colonies, no live or dead or hardwood or conifer trees greater than 5"dbh can be cut from April 1-November 15 without first being evaluated by a qualified Forest Service wildlife biologist to determine suitability.	These design criteria are required "terms and conditions" or "reasonable and prudent measures" in US Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion for the Forest Plan (Forest Plan, Appendix H, C.1.b. and C.1.c.). Also Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines FW51.1.2.3, FW51.1.2.4, FW51.1.2.5.
	To reduce the chances of affecting bat maternity roosts and foraging habitats, no prescribed burns shall be done in upland forests from May 1 - Sept. 1.	
	During prescribed burns, consideration shall be given to smoke-sensitive areas including Indiana or gray bat hibernacula that may lie downwind of the burn. This includes choosing conditions that	

Table 1. Summary of the Design Criteria

	minimize smoke traveling to or settling near the entrance of Brasher Cave, and monitoring of smoke concentrations at the cave entrance.	
	To reduce the chances of adversely affecting Indiana bat, male roosting habitat within 2.5 miles of surrounding known hibernacula, no more than 20% of the habitat in this zone shall be burned (blackened) annually. Within 2.5-5 miles surrounding known hibernacula, no more than 50% shall be burned (blackened) annually.	
	IL Forestry Best Management Practices and Forest Plan standards and guidelines for protection of water quality; bare-soil disturbance in riparian corridors; restoration of disturbed-soil areas; and limitations for use of heavy equipment.	Implementation of the protection measures and management recommendations at Forest Plan FW25 will prevent excessive sedimentation and subsequent effects to aquatic species.
	For the protection of nests and nestlings of migratory birds, prescribed fires should be done as early or late in the season as possible, preferably before 4/15 and after 8/1.	Forest Plan Guideline FW51.1.2.6.
Non-Native Invasive Species	Remove mud, dirt, and plant parts from project equipment before moving it into a project area.	Required by FS policy; use equipment cleaning contract provisions WO-C/CT 6.36 (see Appendix 1 of Guide to Noxious Weed prevention Practices (2001).
	Clean all equipment, before leaving the project site, if operating in areas infested with weeds.	National Strategy and Implementation Plan for Invasive Species Management (2004). Minimize spread of Noxious Weeds from one site to the next.
	Workers should inspect, remove, and properly dispose of weed seed and plant parts found on their clothing and equipment.	Follow suggested Guide to Noxious Weed Prevention Practices (2001). Practice should include before entering and leaving project site.
	Avoid creating favorable conditions that encourage weed establishment by minimizing soil disturbance.	Follow suggested Guide to Noxious Weed Prevention Practices (2001). Monitor established vegetation plots for changes in species and frequency.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposed project first appeared in October 2012 in The Shawnee Quarterly (the Forest’s Schedule of Proposed Actions) and on the Shawnee National Forest internet site, and has remained available in those locations ever since. A legal notice of the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed decision memo was published in the Southern Illinoisan on February 3, 2013. Postcards with the same information were sent to the “All Decisions” mailing list at that time as well. Comments from two individuals were received. Responses to these comments and other project documents are available on the Forest internet site (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/shawnee/landmanagement/projects>).



FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The proposed action is consistent with Standards and Guidelines described in the 2006 Shawnee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and incorporates them by reference.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW (APPEAL) OPPORTUNITIES

This proposal is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. An appeal may be filed by those who have expressed interest in this specific project before close of the formal 30-day comment period. A written notice of appeal must be submitted within 45 calendar days after the Legal Notice of a decision is published in The Southern Illinoisan. However, when the 45-day filing period would end on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, then filing time is extended to the end of the next Federal working day. The date of the publication of the Legal Notice is the only means for calculating the date by which appeals must be submitted; do not rely upon any other source for this information. The Notice of Appeal must be sent to: Appeal Deciding Officer, ATTN: Appeals & Litigation, Forest Service Eastern Region, 626 E. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53202. The Notice of Appeal may alternatively be faxed to: 414-944-3963, ATTN: Appeals Deciding Officer, Forest Service Eastern Regional Office. Those wishing to submit appeals by e-mail may do so to appeals-eastern-shawnee@fs.fed.us. Acceptable formats for electronic comments are text or html e-mail, Adobe portable document format, and formats viewable in Microsoft Office applications. Receipt of electronic appeals to this inbox will be automatically acknowledged. Hand-delivered appeals may be submitted at the above address between 7:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. CT Monday through Friday, except on Federal holidays. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

CONTACT

For further information on this project contact Scott Crist at the Shawnee National Forest, Supervisor's Office, 50 Highway 145 South, Harrisburg, IL 62946, or at (618) 253-1034.

TIM POHLMAN
Forest District Ranger

12/12/13
DATE