



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Southern Region/Ouachita National Forest

September 2026

Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report for the Ouachita National Forest

FY 2018-2023

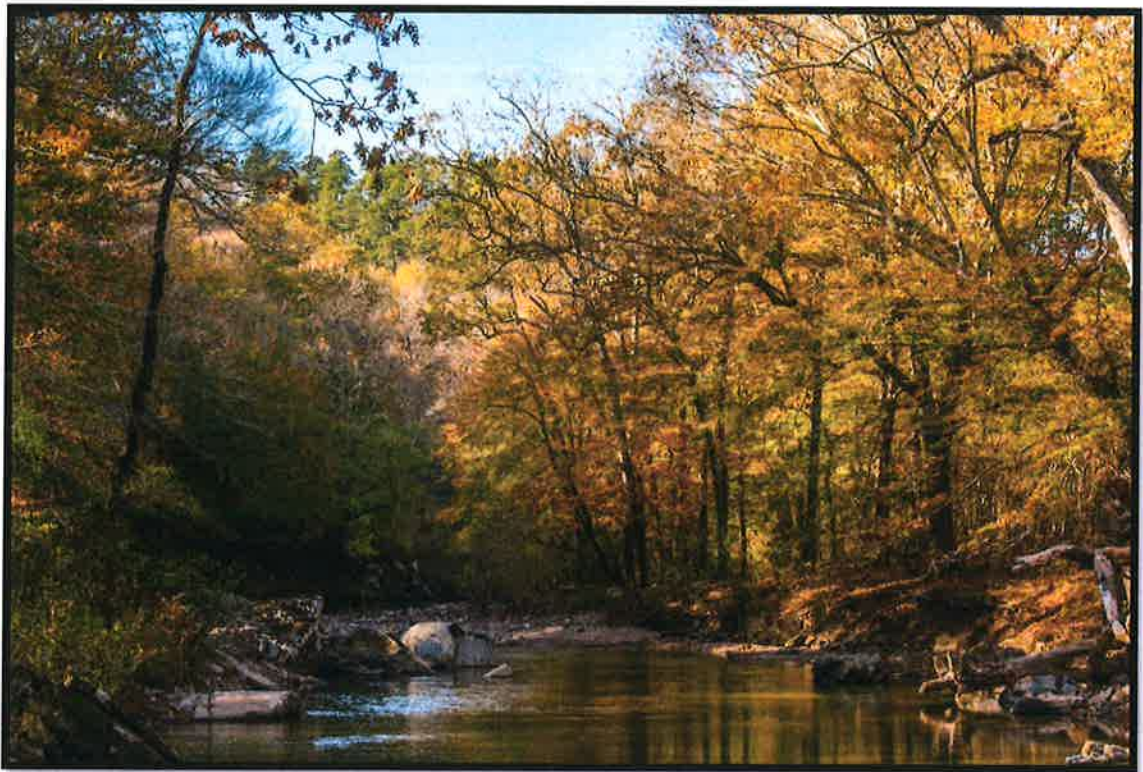


Photo Credit: Amy Bult

For More Information Contact:

Jade Ryles
Environmental Coordinator
Charity.j.ryles@usda.gov
PO Box 1270
Hot Springs, AR 71902

USDA Non-Discrimination Policy Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the State or local Agency that administers the program or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service at 711 (voice and TTY). Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender

Table of Contents

Part I - About the Plan Monitoring Program	3
Purpose	3
How the Plan Monitoring Program Works.....	3
Monitoring Objectives	4
Public Outreach.....	4
Partnerships and Data Sources	5
Part II - Report Summary & Certification	5
Monitoring Results Summary	5
Forest Supervisor's Certification	11
Part III - Topics.....	12
Status of Select Watershed Conditions.....	12
Status of Select Ecological Conditions	15
Status of Focal Species	18
Status of Listed Species.....	20
Visitor Use, Satisfaction, and Progress on Recreation Objectives	22
Environmental Stressors	24
Progress Toward Meeting Desired Conditions and Objectives	25
Effects of Management Systems on Productivity of the Land.....	27
Social, Economic, and Cultural Sustainability	29
Part IV – Crosswalk of Plan Monitoring Indicators to Monitoring Questions.....	36

List of Tables

<i>Table 1. Quantitative Summary of Monitoring Results Addressed in Report (25 Questions)</i>	6
<i>Table 2. Summary of Findings for each Monitoring Question</i>	6
<i>Table 3. Past Monitoring Recommendations Status</i>	10
<i>Table 4. BMP monitoring results by two-year periods</i>	13
<i>Table 5. total acres of a watershed within class 1 condition</i>	13
<i>Table 6. total miles of impaired streams</i>	13
<i>Table 7. Total acres treated to improve soil and water conditions</i>	14
<i>Table 8. Miles of roads maintained/constructed by year</i>	14
<i>Table 9. Number of streams/lakes surveyed and AOPs replaced</i>	16
<i>Table 10. Number of livestock, permittees, and active allotments</i>	16
<i>Table 11. Number of acres treated for NNIS by year</i>	17
<i>Table 12. Early seral habitat acres by year</i>	19
<i>Table 13. Terrestrial TES status on the Forest</i>	20
<i>Table 14. Acres treated with prescribed fire per year</i>	26
<i>Table 15. Cords of firewood sold (cords-CCF x 1.54)</i>	27
<i>Table 16. Chargeable (CV) and Non-Chargeable (Non-CV) Volume Sold (CCF) by FY</i>	28
<i>Table 17. Timber volume offered and sold (CCF) by FY</i>	28
<i>Table 18. Hardwood sawtimber and pulpwood volume sold (CCF) – excluding firewood</i>	30
<i>Table 19. Land use authorizations by year</i>	31
<i>Table 20. Heritage Program Accomplishments</i>	33
<i>Table 21. Agreements Active or Executed during Fiscal Years 2018-2023</i>	34

Part I - About the Plan Monitoring Program

Purpose

The Plan Monitoring Program is described in the 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). This Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report is not a decision document—it evaluates monitoring questions and indicators presented in the Plan Monitoring Program as described in the Forest Plan. The purpose of the Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report is to help the responsible official determine whether a change is needed in Forest Plan direction, such as plan components or other plan content that guide management of resources in the plan area. The Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report represents one part of the Forest Service's overall monitoring program for this National Forest unit.

Monitoring elements in this report are organized into nine topics. This includes the topic of social, economic, and cultural sustainability along with the following additional topics required under FSH 1909.12:

- The status of select watershed conditions.
- The status of select ecological conditions
- The status of focal species
- The status of federally listed threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species
- The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives
- Measurable changes on the plan area related to environmental stressors
- Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan
- The effects of management systems on the productivity of the land

How the Plan Monitoring Program Works

Monitoring and evaluation requirements have been established through the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) at 36 CFR 219. Additional direction is provided by the Forest Service in Chapter 30 – Monitoring – of the Land Management Handbook (FSH 1909.12).

The Ouachita National Forests (ONF) monitoring program was developed during the 2005 revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan. Monitoring indicators were selected in the plan to inform management of resources on the plan area. Monitoring questions have been developed that are consistent with the 2012 planning regulations (36 CFR 219.12) to evaluate the status of these indicators.

Providing timely, accurate monitoring information to the responsible official and the public is a key requirement of the Plan Monitoring Program. This Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report is the vehicle for disseminating this information.

Monitoring Objectives

The objectives of the Plan Monitoring Program include:

- Assess the current condition and trend of selected resources.
- Document implementation of the Plan Monitoring Program.
- Evaluate relevant assumptions, changed conditions, management effectiveness, and progress toward achieving the selected desired conditions, objectives, and goals described in the Forest Plan.
- Assess the status of previous recommended options for change based on previous monitoring evaluation reports.
- Document scheduled monitoring actions that have not been completed and the reasons and rationale why.
- Present any new information not outlined in the current Plan Monitoring Program that is relevant to the evaluation of the selected monitoring indicators.
- Incorporate broader scale monitoring information from the Regional Broader Scale Monitoring Strategy that is relevant to the understanding of the monitoring questions.
- Present recommended change opportunities to the responsible official.

Public Outreach

Information on the Ouachita monitoring program can be found on the Monitoring and Evaluation web page. Links to this monitoring report as well as previous monitoring reports are also available at this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/ouachita/planning>

Information on the ONF planning program is available on the Planning web page. A link to the 2005 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is also available at this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/nfs/files/r08/ouachita/publication/2005%20Forest%20Plan.pdf>

Information regarding the Ouachita National Forests can be found on the ONF home page: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/ouachita>

In addition, members of the public can contact Jade Ryles, Environmental Coordinator, by email at Charity.j.ryles@usda.gov for more details regarding this report and other monitoring or planning information.

Our land management plan and past monitoring reports are available on our planning website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ouachita/landmanagement/planning>

Partnerships and Data Sources

To accomplish our mission, the Forest Service partners with land management agencies across all levels of government, with nonprofit and for-profit entities, universities, and communities large and small. The diversity of our partners parallels the breadth of Forest Service work that includes: managing the nation's 193 million acres of National Forest System lands to sustain healthy terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems; conducting collaborative research that connects the agency to hundreds of partners around the world; supporting States, Tribes, communities, and nonindustrial private landowners through technical and financial assistance; protecting communities and the global environment from catastrophic wildland fires, environmental stressors and invasive species; and inspiring life-long connections to nature for every American.

Monitoring can be expensive, time-consuming, and labor-intensive, so we rely on the help of our partners and work collaboratively with them to accomplish monitoring objectives. Some of the entities that we partner with include:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF), Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation (ODWC), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC), US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Quail Forever (QF), Arkansas Department of Agriculture – Forestry Division (AFD), etc. In 2012, the Ozark-Ouachita Interior Highlands Collaborative (the collaborative) was formed. This group includes many agencies listed above, as well as the Ouachita and Ozark-St. Francis National Forests. The collaborative meets annually to network and discuss proposed and current projects.

The forest also relies on existing data sources such as national and regional inventory, monitoring, and research programs; Federal, State, or local government agencies; scientists, partners, and members of the public; and information from Tribal communities and Alaska Native Corporations.

Part II - Report Summary & Certification

Monitoring Results Summary

Monitoring results are recorded for 25 questions covering a broad range of the 200 or so monitoring elements and objectives in the Plan Monitoring Program. As mentioned in Part I, these 25 questions are separated into nine topic areas. Not every element or objective is evaluated every monitoring cycle, but enough data is reviewed for each topic area to effectively answer the monitoring questions. A crosswalk relating the 25 questions with the Forest Plan's elements and objectives is available in Part IV of this monitoring report.

For the 25 monitoring questions, monitoring results from 2017-2023 revealed that there are two areas that would benefit from management action. Also, there are five items that can be addressed in future forest plans. Finally, there are two areas that need both current

management action and perhaps modification in future forest plans. These last two also represent areas where managers have not been able to meet the pace and scale of Forest Plan direction. Of the other 16 questions, no action or change to either the Forest Plan or monitoring program is recommended.

These results are summarized in Tables 1 through 3 here in Part II for the Forest Supervisor's review. Detailed highlights of the results for the 9 topic areas and the associated 25 questions are presented in Part III of this report.

Table 1. Quantitative Summary of Monitoring Results Addressed in Report (25 Questions)

Results	Yes, need for change	Uncertain	No
Results inconsistent with Forest Plan direction	1		24
Change to future Forest Plan may be warranted	1		24
Change to Plan Monitoring Program may be warranted		1	24
Change to management activities warranted			25

Table 2. Summary of Findings for each Monitoring Question

Monitoring Question	Last Year Updated	Consistency with Forest Plan Intent ¹	Change or Update?	Type of Change or Update Recommended ²
How well are the stream and river aquatic habitat and watershed conditions being protected, enhanced, or maintained?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are watershed improvements conducted on at least 40 acres per year?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Have management practices maintained or improved soil productivity?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Is the road system being managed to protect water quality where possible?	2017	Yes	No	N/A

Monitoring Question	Last Year Updated	Consistency with Forest Plan Intent¹	Change or Update?	Type of Change or Update Recommended²
Are management actions improving and/or maintaining aquatic communities and habitat?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are range allotments managed to standard and what is their progress toward desired condition?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are Forest Plan objectives being met to reduce or eliminate occurrences of NNIS?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Does population data show any trends for focal species that would suggest a need to change forest management or monitoring plans?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Is the Forest improving and/or maintaining a broad diversity of habitats for focal species?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are forest management actions contributing to declines or recovery of populations of species with viability concerns on the Forest?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are developed and dispersed recreation opportunities being managed and maintained to national quality standards?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are scenic integrity objectives being considered during project planning and implementation?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are scenic byways managed for view-shed quality and visual interpretation?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are wilderness character indicators (trends) improving or diminishing over time within designated wilderness areas?	2017	Yes	No	N/A

Monitoring Question	Last Year Updated	Consistency with Forest Plan Intent ¹	Change or Update?	Type of Change or Update Recommended ²
Are Wild and Scenic Rivers being managed for free-flowing condition, outstandingly remarkable values, and water quality?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
What are the status and trends of forest health threats on the Forest?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Is prescribed fire being utilized to restore forest communities according to the desired conditions described in the Forest Plan?	2017	No	Yes	Reconsider prescribed fire Objectives set in the Forest Plan OBJ01
Are hazardous fuels treatments being utilized to reduce risk to local communities?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are timber targets based on sustainable levels?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Is timber harvest enough to continue to support the social and economic needs of the surrounding communities while remaining ecologically sustainable?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are there any trends in criminal behavior that reflect a change in the social, cultural, and/or economic conditions in the area?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are these trends affected in any way by Forest Management?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are there any trends in special use applications or current permits that reflect a change in the social, cultural, and/or economic conditions in the area?	2017	Yes	No	N/A
Are Forest Plan objectives being met for special uses?	2017	Yes	No	N/A

Monitoring Question	Last Year Updated	Consistency with Forest Plan Intent ¹	Change or Update?	Type of Change or Update Recommended ²
Are Forest Plan objectives being met for heritage/tribal relations?	2017	Yes	No	N/A

¹Do results demonstrate progress toward achievement of the plan components associated with this monitoring item?

²Refer to Part III Topics discussions for more details regarding any specific recommendations for change.

³National Environmental Policy Act

Table 3. Past Monitoring Recommendations Status

Monitoring Items	Year of Recommendation	Previous Observation and Current Status
TES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freshwater mussels Leopard darter 	2017	-Mussel species are in decline range wide – there is no specialist at the Forest for mussels – data will have to come from AGFC and ODWC. -not to monitoring protocols but to management to achieve greater genetic diversity; USFWS has the lead.
Desired Conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early Seral Habitat Mid-seral Stage Late Seral Stage 	2017	-Calculation of early seral habitat creation methodology is under revision. FS Veg shows 2,050 acres of early seral by regeneration. Plan called for counting acres of regeneration cuts only - FS Veg continues to be updated regularly.
Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forest Regeneration 	2017	-Calculation of early seral habitat creation methodology is under revision. -Silviculturist are increasing proposed treatment areas with the understanding that once the drains and other protected areas are removed they may end up with the maximum allowed acreage for treatment.

Forest Supervisor's Certification

This report documents the results of monitoring activities that occurred from fiscal year 2018 through fiscal year 2023 on the Ouachita National Forest. The monitoring of some topics is long-term, and evaluation of those data will occur later.

I have evaluated the monitoring and evaluation results presented in this report. I have examined any recommended changes to the 2005 Land Management Plan currently. Based on these results and my evaluation, I consider the 2005 Land Management Plan sufficient to continue to guide land and resource management of the Ouachita National Forest.

DANIEL
OLSEN

Digitally signed by
DANIEL OLSEN
Date: 2026.10.15
06:48:51 -05'00'

Dan Olsen
Forest Supervisor
Date:

Part III - Topics

Status of Select Watershed Conditions

Summary

Streams and rivers on the Ouachita National Forests (ONF) provide for aquatic habitat, riparian dependent species, and for recreation, municipal, commercial, and agricultural uses. Many streams and river systems within south and central Arkansas originate within National Forest boundaries. These streams supply water to the five major rivers – Ouachita, Cossatot, Caddo, Fourche Lafave, and Arkansas. Potential sources of negative effects on water quality come from recreation, road construction, timber harvesting, agriculture, urban development, and natural disturbances.

The goal of monitoring is to determine if watersheds are being maintained (and where necessary restored) to provide resilient and stable conditions to support the quality and quantity of water necessary to protect ecological functions and support intended beneficial uses. To meet this goal, the Forest Plan establishes two monitoring objectives, OBJ14 and OBJ15, specific to watershed function. These monitoring objectives are defined, and key results are provided below. The goal is to identify trends, either positive or negative, to better understand the impact of administrative activities on the forest.

These results will help determine what effect (if any) management actions are having on watershed conditions. Due to the potential effects of the road system on water quality, that is also discussed here.

Monitoring Questions

How well are the stream and river aquatic habitat and watershed conditions being protected, enhanced, or maintained?

Are watershed improvements conducted on at least 40 acres per year?

Have management practices maintained or improved soil productivity?

Is the road system being managed to protect water quality where possible?

Key Results

Best Management Practices (BMP) monitoring occurs in two-year cycles. This monitoring report begins with the conclusion of the 2017-18 period and ends with the 2021-22 BMP monitoring period. The forest's BMP monitoring goal is assigned by the region during each 2-year cycle. The results of the BMP monitoring can be found in the following table:

Table 4. BMP monitoring results by two-year periods

Monitoring Period	2017-18	2019-20	2021-22
Excellent	8	8	11
Good	3	1	2
Poor	1	1	0
No Score Assigned	2	4	1

The Watershed Condition Framework provides a classification of all NFS watersheds based on a core set of national watershed condition indicators. A subset of watersheds is periodically reassessed based on changing conditions brought about by administrative activities or natural events. Many of these changes, while locally important, are not of the magnitude to impact the aggregate condition rating. In 2021, better accounting of indicators affecting aquatic health led to a lowering of total acres within the best (Class 1) category:

Table 5. total acres of a watershed within class 1 condition

Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Acres						
Class 1 Condition	919,291	919,291	935,968	875,245	875,245	875,245

Every two years, states are required to submit 303(d) lists of impaired and threatened waters and identify the impairment. States then establish a prioritized list of waters to receive corrective actions. In 2018, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approved Arkansas' list of impaired streams which included 124 miles of forest streams. Additional miles added in Arkansas in 2020 are mainly from the Cossatot River and its tributaries, while additional miles added in Oklahoma are from Holson Creek and Black Fork Poteau River. Additional miles added in Arkansas in 2022 are entirely from Walnut Creek in Garland County. In most every case, forest streams are included on the 303(d) list for pH, dissolved oxygen, and dissolved minerals, and forest streams have low to moderate priority of remediation. It is likely that parameter exceedances are due to naturally occurring conditions such as rising temperatures, seasonally low flows, and contributions from dissolved bedrock:

Table 6. total miles of impaired streams

Fiscal Year	2018	2020	2022
Arkansas Stream Miles	124	167	173
Oklahoma Stream Miles	70	77	77

Each year, administrative activities directly and indirectly improve soil and water conditions across the forest. Activities such as prescribed fire and non-native invasive species treatments offer indirect improvements to soil conditions, while stream channel improvements or soil amendments can directly improve soil conditions. In every year from 2018-23 the acres treated have exceeded the 40-acre goal established in the Forest Plan.

Table 7. Total acres treated to improve soil and water conditions

Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Acres Treated	1,295	961	2,383	1,200 (est.)	1,409	1,988

No road decommissioning was recorded from 2018-2023. Most road decommissioning is occurring through abandoning roads (berming and allowing to grow back in) without physically restoring the ground back to natural contours. This is being analyzed in individual NEPA documents at the district level but is not being recorded or tracked by the Supervisor's Office (SO) engineering.

Declining funding for road maintenance activities is contributing to difficulties in meeting maintenance level objectives and classes. During 2017, 1,360.50 miles of road were operated and maintained to meet maintenance level objectives and classes. In addition to maintenance, 3.91 miles of arterial/collector roads were reconstructed (6 roads), but no new arterial/collector roads were constructed. Plus, 16.49 miles of local roads were reconstructed, and 15.28 miles of roads were removed from the system (decommissioned) during 2017. Road Maintenance funding for 2017 was \$1,379,396 in regular appropriated funds and \$2,992,223 in Emergency Relief for Federally Owned (ERFO) roads' funds.

Table 8. Miles of roads maintained/constructed by year

Year	Miles Maintained	Miles Reconstructed	Miles of New Road Construction
2018	1,381	58	1.15
2019	1,381	35	0.4
2020	1,382	24	0
2021	1,379	26	0.6
2022	1,378	30	1.4
2023	1,378	29	0

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes

Status of Select Ecological Conditions

Summary

This section includes ecological indicators or monitoring elements that haven't been covered elsewhere in this monitoring report. This includes the results of stream condition surveys and non-native invasive plant species (NNIS) infestations and treatments. Stream condition surveys are taken periodically to measure aquatic habitat conditions. Forest Plan objectives include increasing pool habitat by placing large woody debris in-stream and improving aquatic organism passage. Monitoring is also done to evaluate both lake and stream fish communities. In addition, the Forest Plan also has set objectives for range management and treatment of NNIS which will be discussed here.

Monitoring Questions

Are management actions improving and/or maintaining aquatic communities and habitat?

Are range allotments managed to standard and what is their progress toward desired condition?

Are Forest Plan objectives being met to reduce or eliminate occurrences of NNIS?

Key Results

Stream condition surveys were conducted on 44 streams during the 2018-2033 period. These surveys were largely tied to NEPA project support. Results of fish identified from these surveys are consistent with Robison and Buchanan (2020). Specific species are tracked by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Channels can be characterized as intermittent and often become dry several times per year. Forest Service management actions and related Best Management Practices appear to be maintaining stream conditions across the forest.

Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP): 37 AOP's were completed on the forest during the 2018-2023 period. Improving road-stream crossings benefits aquatic organisms by allowing them to freely migrate up or downstream past the crossing structure, and by reducing long term sedimentation from the road.

Table 9. Number of streams/lakes surveyed and AOPs replaced

Year	Number of Streams/Lakes Surveyed	Number of AOP Structures Replaced
2018	5 lakes seined, 18 streams surveyed	21
2019	5 lakes seined	8
2020	0	0
2021	8 streams surveyed	1
2022	7 streams surveyed	0
2023	11 streams surveyed	7

The range program has been relatively stable since 2010. Permittees and active allotments have remained unchanged since 2015 with three permittees and three active allotments. Use is consistent with the three standards found at 9.08 and 9.09 that require grazing and watering sources to be carried out in such a way that is not damaging to the Streamside Management Area as well as standard 9.10 that allows grazing within limits of useable forage and protects water quality. The current conditions of the range allotments are in line with desired conditions and plan standards. Likewise, current management is adequate to protect Ouachita NF resources without adjusting suitability determinations made in the 2005 Forest Plan.

Table 10. Number of livestock, permittees, and active allotments

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of Livestock	129	129	129	129	134	134
Permittees	3	3	3	3	3	3
Active Allotments	2	2	2	2	2	2

Since the creation of the JWF District-wide EA, in 2016, that addressed management of NNIS, other districts have used that as a template and added NNIS to their watershed EA's. Some of the acres occurred in large areas by repeatedly spraying roadside ditches, hand spraying during glade restoration (TNC partnership). The most common invasive species continues to be *Sericea lespedeza*. Infestations most often appear along roads, trails, and adjacent to bridges where treatment is restricted to protect water quality. Districts often collect KV dollars to spray treat roadsides in logging units to slow the spread of any NNIS on the interior.

In 2019, the AGFC trapped and killed eight feral hogs on FS lands for 1470 ac of mechanical removal of an invasive species.

Table 11. Number of acres treated for NNIS by year

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Acres Treated	791	580	1,008	876	902	719

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes

Status of Focal Species

Summary

The results of this section will identify any notable changes in status or trends in either the habitat or population of the focal/MIS (Management Indicator) species listed below. These species represent various habitat types or focus areas managed by the Ouachita National Forest. Changes in population trends serve as early warning signs that management may need to make extra effort to support these populations or their associated niches. In addition, the status of fish and game species is evaluated.

Monitoring Questions

Does population data show any trends for focal species that would suggest a need to change forest management or monitoring plans?

Are the Forests improving and/or maintaining a broad diversity of habitats for focal species?

Key Results

Management indicator/focal species are analyzed separately from the federally listed threatened and endangered species. The Forest Plan identified seven terrestrial MIS, and except for deer, all are bird species. Each bird species provides its own challenge to determine trends. Since breeding bird points are completed May to June, of each season, they do not account for weather, seasonality and environmental stressors. The total species detected can vary greatly from year to year, making trends within our bird point data difficult to analyze.

The AGFC (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission) has several surveys for eastern wild turkey, northern bobwhite quail and white-tailed deer. Harvest records are also used to detect trends. Early seral habitat, as a whole, is declining across the state and southeastern US. The forest service created 9,759 acres of early seral habitat through timber cutting with 2018 having the most creation at 2,158 acres and 2019 having the lowest rate at 1,259 acres. Loss of habitat is reported with a downward trending of prairie warbler and northern bobwhite. Eastern wild turkey have seen an increase in populations across the state, according to AGFC turkey biologist using harvest surveys. Gobbler harvests on the Ouachita are down, slightly, from 2019, pre-covid hunting. Northern bobwhite quail records on FS wildlife management areas (WMA's) are trending back to stable, following a 2022 downturn. Prairie warblers, scarlet tanagers and pileated woodpecker habitat remains stable.

The most concerning habitat is early seral creation, which in turn, affects prairie warblers. The trending of these three species can depend on forest data from breeding bird surveys and they can be unreliable, as mentioned above. Prairie warbler numbers, for example, are almost ¼ of what they were in 2012. Environmental stressors and earlier warm weather may affect nesting, therefore, missing during the BBS dates. Pileated Woodpecker numbers vary for the same reason. In 2012, 110 were heard with numbers fluctuating until 2023, at 58 birds.

Table 12. Early seral habitat acres by year

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Early Seral Habitat Acres	2,158	1,259	1,868	1,849	1,317	1,308

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes

Status of Listed Species

Summary

Conditions required to contribute to species recovery are monitored to measure management specific effects to federally listed threatened and endangered species, and of selected sensitive and locally rare species. It is important to identify species with notable changes in status or trends for both habitat and population. The desired condition is populations of threatened, endangered, or sensitive species above the levels necessary for long-term viability and available habitat to maintain and support the recovery of these species.

Monitoring Questions

Are forest management actions contributing to declines or recovery of populations of species with viability concerns on the Forest?

Key Results

The Ouachita NF is making investments in improving stream/road crossings, ponds, as well headwater channel restoration efforts. The Forest implements BMPs and follows Forest Plan direction to protect aquatic resources on National Forest lands. There is no indication that current forest management actions are contributing to declines or recovery of populations of aquatic or terrestrial species.

Table 13. Terrestrial TES status on the Forest

Common Name and Scientific Name	Federal Listing	2018-2023 Status	Notes
American Burying beetle (<i>Nicrophorus americanus</i>)	Endangered	Stable	Surveys occur on 2 districts every other year.
Monarch Butterfly (<i>Danaus plexippus</i>)	Proposed Threatened	Stable	No official surveys
American bumble bee (<i>Bombus pensylvanicus</i>)	Candidate Species	Decreasing	Assuming presence
Indiana Bat (<i>Myotis sodalis</i>)	Endangered	Newly found Ouachita species (May 2023). Increasing statewide.	Confirmed acoustic calls in 2023 on forest but no bats netted. DNA confirmed on Tiak.
Northern Long-Eared Bat (<i>Myotis septentrionalis</i>)	Threatened	Declining statewide	Edmonds, 2022.
Tri-colored Bat	Proposed endangered	Decreasing	Numbers have not recovered from WNS.
Piping Plover (<i>Charadrius melodus</i>)	Endangered	NA - Only passing occurrences on the Forest	10 individuals documented at Red Slough since 2000.

Common Name and Scientific Name	Federal Listing	2018-2023 Status	Notes
Least Tern (<i>Sterna antillarum</i>)	Endangered	NA - Not evaluated- Red Slough only	No longer Endangered for interior lands
Red Knot (<i>Calidris cantus rufa</i>)	Threatened	NA - Only passing occurrences on the Forest	2004 documentation at Red Slough.
Eastern Black Rail (<i>Laterallus jamaicensis spp.jamaicensis</i>)	Threatened	NA - Only passing occurrences on the Forest	2022 documentation at Red Slough.
Red-cockaded Woodpecker (<i>Picoides borealis</i>)	Endangered	Increasing	Steady increase in nesting attempts.
American Alligator (<i>Alligator mississippiensis</i>)	Threatened	Population decreasing at Red Slough	Downward trend. Researchers analyzing data.
Alligator Snapping Turtle (<i>Macrochelys temminckii</i>)	Proposed Threatened	Unknown due to new listing	Seeking informal consultation case by case basis
Missouri Bladderpod (<i>Lesquerella filiformis</i>)	Threatened	Stable	Annual surveys
Harparella (<i>Ptilimnium nodosum</i>)	Endangered	Stable	Annual surveys

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes

Visitor Use, Satisfaction, and Progress on Recreation Objectives

Summary

Abundant opportunities exist for the public to use and enjoy the Ouachita NF. Areas or facilities include developed recreation sites, semi-private and wilderness areas and trails. Recreation participation, activities, and services contribute to visitors' physical and mental well-being and represent a variety of skill levels, needs, and desires. Quality fish and wildlife habitat and a variety of access opportunities are available to the public. Facilities and infrastructure are high quality, well-maintained, safe, accessible, and consistent with visitors' expectations. Primitive recreation and semi primitive opportunities are maintained and roaded-natural recreation opportunities on much of the remainder of the Forest. Existing "rural" recreation opportunities in developed recreation areas are maintained. This section will discuss visitor use and satisfaction, as well as track success on recreation objectives.

Monitoring Questions

Are developed and dispersed recreation opportunities being managed and maintained to national quality standards?

Are scenic integrity objectives being considered during project planning and implementation?

Are scenic byways managed for view-shed quality and visual interpretation?

Are wilderness character indicators (trends) improving or diminishing over time within designated wilderness areas?

Are Wild and Scenic Rivers being managed for free-flowing condition, outstandingly remarkable values, and water quality?

Key Results

- All districts continue to complete annual inspections of developed sites, trails, and bridges. Developed and dispersed recreation areas are being managed to national and regional quality standards. The National Visitor Use Monitoring Program is completed every 5 years and was not completed during this Biennial Monitoring Cycle.
- Thanks to the partnership with the Friends of the Ouachita Trail, approximately 192 miles of trail maintenance was accomplished annually between 2018 and 2023 on pedestrian/hiking trails along the Ouachita National Recreation Trail and many associated connector trails. During this same period, the Friends of the Ouachita Trail constructed 13 new Adirondack type trail shelters, in addition to the original 9 trail shelters on the Ouachita Trail. These trail shelters are based approximately 10-miles apart, allowing hikers to utilize them while hiking the trail.

- The ONF provides over 2,300 miles of road open to OHV use which is approximately 25% of the ONF designated transportation system. There are also an additional 172 miles of motorized trail available for offroad OHV use across the ONF. OHV use continued to increase on these resources during this monitoring cycle.
- When accomplishing management activities along scenic byways and in areas of high scenic quality, projects incorporate scenery considerations through design criteria included in the NEPA analysis process. Recent Scenic Byway improvements include installation of new National Forest portal signs on Scenic Byways.
- Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) are managed for free-flowing, outstandingly remarkable values and water quality. District NEPA projects consider potential effects to WSR and utilize design criteria to avoid significant impacts. Projects completed that positively affect WSR conditions include a concrete dam removal on Mine Creek a tributary to the Cossatot River, a designated WSR in 2019.
- Wilderness Character Monitoring results were used to compare wilderness conditions to the baseline. The qualities measured were Untrammeled, Natural, Undeveloped, Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation, and Other Features of Value.

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes

Environmental Stressors

Summary

Forest lands are experiencing increased threats from fire, insect and non-native plant invasions, disease, extreme weather, and drought. Scientists project increases in temperature and changes in rainfall patterns that can make these threats occur more often, with more intensity, and/or for longer durations. Some of the areas that may require extra attention in monitoring include temperature, precipitation, forest health, non-native invasive species, and fire management as well as the effects on climate from carbon sequestration.

Monitoring Questions

What are the status and trends of forest health threats on the Forest?

Key Results

- In the short-term, the regional report found no need for change in individual National Forests' plan direction, management activities, or monitoring arising from this evaluation.
- Projections suggest that future warming is expected, resulting in 25 to 70 more days above 90 degrees Fahrenheit and 11 to 32 fewer freezing days per year. Change in precipitation is less of a concern for the Southern Region as a significant decrease in precipitation is not expected.
- Amphibians such as salamanders may be most at risk, due to dependencies on moisture and cool temperatures that could be altered. Greater ambient temperatures may also be harmful to mammals such as the endangered Indiana bat.
- It will be increasingly important to emphasize conservation of riparian habitats as well as high elevation areas to provide refugia for species adjusting to changing climate conditions. Restoration activities should be planned to maintain and improve habitat connectivity in those areas that may become increasingly important as habitat islands.
- Projected increase in temperatures can allow invasive pests and plants to increase their spread. Invasive and aggressive plant and insect species may increasingly outcompete or negatively affect native species in the future. Winter freezes currently limit many forest pests, but higher temperatures will likely allow these species to increase. Destructive insects may be better able to take advantage of forests due to factors such as increased drought. Certain invasive plant species may increase dramatically as they are able to tolerate a wide range of harsh conditions, allowing them to rapidly move into new areas.
- Increased water temperature due to warming climate can potentially lead to an increase in toxic algal blooms in lakes as well as negatively affect cool-water stream communities.
- Extended periods of extreme high temperature and drought may lead to drier forest fuels which will burn more easily and contribute to larger and more frequent wildfires.

Recommended Changes

No change recommended

Progress Toward Meeting Desired Conditions and Objectives

Summary

A key indicator of desired condition in the Forest Plan is the abundance and distribution of the various forest types. Several management objectives are tied to percentage of each type, age class distribution within type, and treatment acres for each. Monitoring allows managers to identify forest types that are under-represented across the landscape and areas where the pace and scale of treatment does not meet the desired goals. Consideration of traditional silvicultural treatments including prescribed fire will be included here. Application of prescribed fire in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) will also be discussed here as it is not covered elsewhere in the report.

The Forest Plan outlines several key indicators that are essential for assessing the restoration of forest communities to their desired ecological conditions. Effective fire management is a fundamental aspect of achieving the objectives specified within the Forest Plan. Through diligent monitoring, managers can identify forest types that are underrepresented in various landscapes and determine whether the pace and scale of management treatments are sufficient to meet established goals. This section will provide an overview of several critical areas: the number of acres treated with prescribed fire annually, the improvements of fire regime condition classes, acreage treated in both Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and non-WUI areas, achievements during the growing season, treatments applied across different community types, accomplishments under prescribed fire agreements, and data regarding wildfires, including average acres affected and those initiated by lightning.

Monitoring Questions

Is prescribed fire being utilized to restore forest communities according to the desired conditions described in the Forest Plan?

Are hazardous fuels treatments being utilized to reduce risk to local communities?

Key Results

The Ouachita National Forest remains dedicated to enhancing desired ecological conditions through the use of prescribed fire. Throughout the years, various challenges have influenced the extent of acres treated, and we anticipate facing additional challenges in the future. Nevertheless, the progress in acres treated since 2020 has been commendable. In 2023, we successfully implemented prescribed fire on over 190,000 acres, resulting in significant improvements in fire regime condition classes across the forest. Fire regime includes how frequently fires occur and the season of the burn (dormant or growing season). A natural fire regime is a general classification of the role fire would play across a landscape in the absence of modern human mechanical intervention but including the influence of aboriginal burning (Agee 1993). For purposes of the Report, the cool or dormant season is October through February, and the growing season, March through September. Most of the natural communities of the Ouachita NF

are slightly, moderately, or highly dependent on certain fire regimes to restore and maintain “good” conditions

Forest Plan Objective Page 59. OBJ01. Increase prescribed fire to an average of 180,000 acres per year by 2011 to help achieve and maintain desired community conditions. Performance Indicator: acres treated with prescribed fire per year.

Table 14. Acres treated with prescribed fire per year

Year	Acres Treated with Prescribed Fire
2018	114,432
2019	63,152
2020	56,599
2021	163,325
2022	170,599
2023	190,011

Recommended Changes

- Efforts to reintegrate fire into the landscape have not fully achieved the objectives set forth in the Forest Plan. Nevertheless, programs are beginning to regain momentum following the initial disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Fire managers have successfully enhanced the pace and scale of burning activities over the consecutive years of 2021, 2022, and 2023. However, expanding the number of acres burned continues to present challenges due to various constraints on burn windows, including weather conditions, personnel availability, and legal regulations. Consequently, there may be limitations on the ability to consistently meet these targets.
- The Ouachita National Forest has been successful in achieving approximately 65% of its prescribed burning treatment goals on average over the past decade. During the next Forest Plan revision, it is crucial to evaluate whether the objectives outlined in the plan accurately and realistically reflect the number of acres that can be successfully treated.

Effects of Management Systems on Productivity of the Land

Summary

Management activities can have a negative effect on the productivity of forests. The National Forest Management Act requires forest managers to, "Conserve soil and water resources and not allow significant or permanent impairment of the productivity of the land." It is important to monitor for any signs of degradation for habitat and watershed conditions. Silviculture practices should be mindful of maintaining site productivity and timber production should be based on sustainable levels. Watershed conditions were covered in an earlier section of this monitoring report, so the focus in this section will be on soil and timber productivity.

Monitoring Questions

Are timber targets based on sustainable levels?

Key Results

Demand for firewood remains high and stable with no discernable trends. The Forest Plan contains two design criteria or standards specifically for firewood:

FW001: Hardwood will be made available for firewood as identified through project level analysis.

FW002: In areas where trees have been treated with herbicide, use of treated trees for firewood will not be allowed.

Volumes of firewood remained fairly steady during the first 4 years of plan implementation but have fluctuated greatly in the period 2010 – 2017. Since 2017, demand for firewood has been consistent and lower than normal. The cords of firewood sold are shown in the following tabulation. The 415 cords sold in 2023 were the least amount sold under the 2005 Forest Plan to date.

Table 15. Cords of firewood sold (cords-CCF x 1.54)

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Cords Sold	819	666	663	572	572	415	515

Source: Timber Cut and Sold Report as reported at the end of the fiscal year.

Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)

A priority of the timber sale program is to contribute to the economic base of local communities by providing a sustained yield of high-quality wood products at a level consistent with sound economic principles, local market demands, and desired ecological conditions. To this end, the Ouachita NF sold 73.87% of ASQ in 2024 and an average of 69.05% of ASQ over the last 19

years, as shown in the following tabulation. The ASQ for the Ouachita NF is 27 million cubic feet per year (270,000 CCF). Timber removed from lands unsuitable for timber production and volume harvested by salvage (non-chargeable volume) are excluded when calculating timber volumes chargeable to the allowable sale quantity.

Table 16. Chargeable (CV) and Non-Chargeable (Non-CV) Volume Sold (CCF) by FY

Year	Green		Salvage		Total	
	CV	Non-CV	CV	Non-CV	CV	Non-CV
2018	168,826	0	4,901	338	174,065	338
2019	169,605	253	1,607	207	171,212	460
2020	199,895	51	1,262	0	201,157	51
2021	170,586	2	288	0	170,874	2
2022	170,525	293	210	0	170,735	293
2023	224,163	1,184	3,668	0	227,831	1,184
2024	196,083	306	3,356	0	199,439	306
Total	1,299,683	2,089	15,292	545	1,315,313	2,634
Annual Average	185,669	298	2,185	78	187,902	376

Source: CDW – PTSAR - Reports PTSR201F & PTSR202F

Timber Volume Offered and Sold

Forest Plan Objective 41 is as follows: *"Sell an average of at least 200,000 hundred cubic feet (CCF) of timber per year."*

Since 2006, the Ouachita NF has sold an average of almost 92% of the objective of 200,000 CCF. The objective of at least 200,000 CCF per year was exceeded in 2007, 2008, 2011, 2017, 2020, and 2023. For 2024, 199,755 CCF was sold. The timber volumes offered and sold by year are shown in the following table:

Table 17. Timber volume offered and sold (CCF) by FY

Year	Volume Offered	Volume Sold
2018	229,187	174,065
2019	160,779	171,672
2020	217,291	201,208
2021	153,812	170,876
2022	176,464	171,028
2023	200,606	229,015
2024	190,699	199,745

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes.

Social, Economic, and Cultural Sustainability

Summary

Contributions to social and economic sustainability of communities, multiple use management in the plan area, and progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives related to social and economic sustainability are covered in this section. This includes local contributions by the Ouachita NF to social, economic, and cultural factors as well as conservation education, heritage, facilities, lands, minerals, special uses, and safety.

Regional socio-economic conditions for the Ouachita NF and the Southern Region can be found in the Broad-Scale Socioeconomic Monitoring Evaluation Report for the Southern Region. The last edition of that report in 2020 was included in this report. The next edition of the Broad-Scale report will be discussed in the 2024-2026 monitoring report.

Monitoring Questions

Is timber harvest enough to continue to support the social and economic needs of the surrounding communities while remaining ecologically sustainable?

Are there any trends in criminal behavior that reflect a change in the social, cultural, and/or economic conditions in the area?

Are these trends affected in any way by Forest Management?

Are there any trends in special use applications or current permits that reflect a change in the social, cultural, and/or economic conditions in the area?

Are Forest Plan objectives being met for special uses?

Are Forest Plan objectives being met for heritage/tribal relations?

Key Results

A key priority of the Forest Plan is to "develop local economy marketing opportunities to improve utilization of hardwood products." The Ouachita National Forest has limited opportunities for such developments. However, since 2017, all Ranger Districts have started offering hardwood saw timber and/or hardwood pulpwood in their sales. Depending on the ratio of pine to hardwood in a sale, bids are now being received on sales that include hardwood products. The volume of hardwood sold by product is shown in the table below.

Table 18. Hardwood sawtimber and pulpwood volume sold (CCF) – excluding firewood

Year	Hardwood Sawtimber	Hardwood Pulp	Total Hardwood
2018	1,907	5,757	7,664
2019	2,838	11,575	14,412
2020	4,450	14,967	19,417
2021	2,738	13,302	16,040
2022	8,638	15,386	24,025
2023	8,918	15,879	22,796
2024	7,663	9,237	16,900

Source: Timber Cut and Sold Reports

There were 486 special authorizations with an issued status on the Forest as of 2023, which constituted an increase of 18 authorizations over the 2018 total of 468. Road and utility right-of-way authorizations, while not significantly increasing in total number, contributed to the largest proportion of the processing work. As private property sales in the area have picked up during this timeframe, transfers of road easements and issuance of new road permits are required to reflect the change in ownership. There has been a notable increase in the number of fiber optic cable requests, typically from companies that have an existing authorization that we amend to add the new line rather than issuing a new authorization, so while the number of authorizations is static, there is still a significant amount of processing going on to accommodate the additional lines. There has also been an increase during this reporting period for wireless communications uses as companies are updating their equipment and facilities while they transition from LTE to 5G technology.

- The number of road authorizations continues to rise as the backlog of unauthorized occupancies are issued permits. Also contributing to the increase in access requests is the numerous properties within the OUF that have traditionally been idle timber tracts that are now being developed for residential use.
- Utility permit amendments are increasing as federal and state governments have created several programs to increase broadband access in rural areas.
- Permits issued for research and heritage resource surveys are relatively stable.
- Dams/Reservoirs, agricultural uses and community uses remain unchanged from 2015 and increases or decreases are not anticipated.
- Communication uses increased slightly during the reporting period mostly due to the addition of ancillary facilities such as generators and fuel tanks to remote sites to allow communications companies to maintain service to customers during power outages.
- Recreation uses are mostly short-term, recurring events. The amount of use has remained relatively stable. The slight decline that is showing is mostly due to combining several authorizations for different events conducted by one group into a single authorization.

A measure of success in assuring that uses of NFS land comply with the terms and conditions of the authorizations is the number of permits administered to standard. During this reporting window, administration of special use authorizations was severely diminished as a result of employees not reporting to the office due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Also, during this time, there was an exodus of realty staff that resulted in limited personnel available to conduct inspections in the field and process applications. As a result, the number of authorizations administered to standard declined severely. As employees returned to the office and new employees were hired to replace those that left, the number has began to recover as shown in 2023, which is expected to continue.

Table 19. Land use authorizations by year

Year	Land use authorizations administered to standard	Number of land use proposals and applications processed	Number of ROW cases accomplished
2018	302	5	4
2019	291	8	5
2020	225	15	11
2021	161	11	9
2022	37	21	17
2023	165	14	8

Recreational OHV activity on the Ouachita National Forest continues to increase annually, resulting in a steady rise in MVUM violations. Alcohol-related and traffic offenses frequently coincide with OHV use. Law Enforcement currently utilizes two UTVs and one ATV for OHV enforcement. The Tiak Ranger District has experienced a notable increase in recreational OHV use, driven in part by multiple rental outfitters operating in the area. LEI is in the process of acquiring an additional UTV for the Broken Bow LEO position.

- **826 violations** were documented for Motor Vehicle Use in Undesignated Areas from FY18-23.

Forest product violations- Illegal moss collecting and crystal digging remain common on the National Forest. These activities typically result in violations for Removing or Damaging Natural Features or Removing/Damaging Forest Products Without a Permit. Crystal digging on the Jessieville and Womble Districts surged during the COVID-19 period and remains popular. Crystal Digging causing substantial resource damage and hand-dug pits over six feet deep have been found on the National Forest.

From FY18-23:

- **159 violations** involved Damaging/Removing Natural Features.
- **146 violations** involved Damaging/Removing Forest Products Without a Permit.

In 2022 and 2023 a noticeable drop in certain violations was likely due to the Supervisors Orders being expired for approximately two years. In 2024 the Forest Service went through a CFR revision which moved many CFRs from subpart "B" to "A" so that they no longer require an order.

Heritage resource sites managed to standard (sites inventoried, evaluated, protected, promoted, preserved, restored, rehabilitated, monitored, or enhanced), the number of properties of heritage resource evaluation accomplished, and the number of acres of heritage resource survey (Section 110 survey) accomplished for Fiscal Years 2018-2023 are reported in Table 19.

Priority Heritage Assets (PHAs) are heritage sites with public value that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- The site has an official designation such as listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- There is a prior investment in preservation, interpretation, and use.
- The site is recognized in an agency-approved management plan.
- The site exhibits critical deferred maintenance needs and those needs have been documented (where critical deferred maintenance is a potential health or safety risk or imminent loss of significant resource values).

PHAs are monitored on a five-year rotation. Each fiscal year, a percentage of PHAs are monitored and their condition assessed. From 2018 to 2023 the number of heritage resource sites designated and managed as Priority Heritage Assets (PHAs) on the Ouachita National Forest increased from 182 to 223.

Archeological collections are also considered PHAs. In Fiscal Years 2018-2020 efforts were made to prepare collections for curation. Volunteer lab days were held at the Supervisor's Office South Complex in Hot Springs. The lab days contributed most of the volunteer hours reported for FY2018-FY2020. Other volunteer hours were achieved through stewardship activities at heritage resource sites or other NHPA Section 110 activities.

Presently, the Ouachita NF has 29 properties formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 2017, the Ouachita NF partnered with the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program to nominate the Army & Navy Memorial Lodge, an Army and Navy Hospital recreation building, to the National Register of Historic Places. Formal transfer of ownership from the Department of Labor to the Ouachita NF occurred in FY2019 and the Memorial Lodge was officially Listed on the National Register on September 27, 2019.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 provides a process for identifying and returning cultural patrimony to Native Americans. In 2014, to implement the act, the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma signed comprehensive NAGPRA agreements with the Ouachita and Ozark-St. Francis National Forests. To date, all archeological collections curated by the Ouachita NF have been examined for human remains. Analysis revealed several small-bone fragments representing 12 individuals of Choctaw or Caddo affiliation from seven Oklahoma sites. In 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding between the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and the Ouachita NF for repatriation and reburial of human remains was ratified. On May 13, 2019, remains were transferred to the Choctaw Nation. This was followed by reburial, under Farm Bill authority, on Forest Service lands in Oklahoma. Progress continues to be made on the repatriation of human remains affiliated with Caddo Nation.

One ARPA case was concluded on the Ouachita National Forest in 2019. On March 30, 2018, Ouachita NF employees visited the Hick's Site (3SC0132) for routine monitoring. 3SC0132 is a major pre-contact site in the Fourche La Fave River Valley that has been the object of looting in

the past. The employee observed five recently excavated pits. More evidence of digging was observed in the following months. The damage assessment was initiated on June 14, 2018, and was completed June 4, 2019. In 2019, three suspects were identified and warrants served. All three suspects pled guilty to ARPA and other related charges, were ordered to pay restitution, and forfeited all artifacts confiscated.

Agreements with consulting parties, state agencies, and research organizations are reported in Table 21.

In May and June 2021, the Ouachita NF signed a Memorandum of Understanding and a Section 111 Historic Property Lease, respectively, with the Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism, State Parks Division (ADHPT) for the transfer of administration of Camp Ouachita and Lake Sylvia Day Use Area and Campground. Camp Ouachita, constructed during the Great Depression between 1936 and 1940 by the Works Progress Administration and lying on the northwest shoreline of Lake Sylvia, has historic significance and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Camp Ouachita National Historic District.

During FY2021 the USDA Enterprise Program was contracted to develop a Collections Management Plan for the Ouachita NF and Historic Property Preservation Plans for the Historic Headquarters (SO South) and the Army and Navy Memorial Lodge at the Job Corps Center (NRHP listed September 27, 2019). The Historic Headquarters is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Forest Service Headquarters Historic District (listed September 14, 1993). These plans were stipulations in an MOA between the Ouachita NF and Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPPP/SHPO) to mitigate the adverse effects of the conveyance of the Headquarters Historic District. The Collections Management Plan provides an overview and plan for the Ouachita National Forest Heritage Collection. The Forest Heritage Collection includes program records, heritage site and survey records, archival documents, and artifact collections. The plans were completed in FY2022.

Table 20. Heritage Program Accomplishments

Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Section 106 Projects	78	80	40	34	39	64
Section 106 Survey Acres	14,756	7,878	6,866	13,525	2,722	14,911
Newly Recorded Cultural Resources 106 Survey	72	42	46	34	42	111
Section 110 Survey Acres	227	247	123	231	196	156
Newly Recorded Cultural Resources 110 Survey	10	2	9	4	1	8
Cultural Resources Revisited 106 Projects	116	79	93	135	127	190

Fiscal Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cultural Resources Protected from Project Activities	103	112	166	76	52	213
Cultural Resource NRHP Evaluations	23	14	131	34	19	277
Total Number of PHAs	182	188	197	203	206	223
PHA Condition Assessments	53	23	32	45	40	64
Stewardship Activities	2	4	8	2	8	28
Total Sites Revisited	171	106	133	182	175	282
Public Outreach Events	5	10	5	3	5	14
Volunteer Hours	1900	1416	600	98	92	88
Historic Properties Newly Listed on the National Register of Historic Places	0	1	0	0	0	0

Table 21. Agreements Active or Executed during Fiscal Years 2018-2023

Type	Partner	Execution Date	Term	Description
Comprehensive Agreement	Caddo Nation	03/14/14	5 years	Comprehensive NAGPRA & ARPA Protocols Agreement
Comprehensive Agreement	Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	03/24/14	5 years	Comprehensive NAGPRA & ARPA Protocols Agreement
Participating Agreement	United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians of Oklahoma (UKB)	12/02/16	5 years	Heritage surveys using UKB paraprofessional crew, other Heritage program needs
Participating Agreement	Cherokee Nation	04/19/18	1 year	Heritage surveys using Cherokee Nation paraprofessional crew, other Heritage program needs
Memorandum of Understanding	Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma	10/02/18	2 years	MOU for Repatriation of NAGPRA remains
Participating Agreement	Arkansas Archeological	03/01/19	5 years	Curation, surveys, trainings, other heritage program needs

Type	Partner	Execution Date	Term	Description
	Survey (ARAS)			
Memorandum of Agreement	Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP/SHPO)	07/02/20	4 years	MOA to mitigate adverse effects of conveyance of National Register Listed historic property - Historic Forest Headquarters Complex
Memorandum of Understanding	Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism (ADPHT)	05/01/21	5 years	MOU for Historic Properties Camp Ouachita and Lake Sylvia
Section 111 Lease	Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage, and Tourism (ADPHT)	06/01/21	20 years	Historic Property Lease - Camp Ouachita and Lake Sylvia
Participating Agreement	United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee Indians of Oklahoma (UKB)	08/01/21	5 years	Heritage surveys using UKB paraprofessional crew, other Heritage program needs

The Forest Plan identifies a desired condition that the “Forest is maintained in a condition that allows Native American tribes and individuals to retain traditional connections to the land and to foster both traditional and contemporary cultural uses of the Forest. The Forest has active agreements and protocols to facilitate consultation (all resources) and government-to-government relationships”.

In January 2020, the Ouachita National Forest (OUF) and Ozark-St. Francis (OSF) National Forests filled the shared Tribal Relations Specialist (TRS) position. This was the first permanent full-time position in the Southern Region. Prior to 2020, Tribal Relations was the responsibility of the Heritage Program Manager on each respective Forest. The Ouachita National Forest consults with 11 Tribal Nations. The Ozark-St. Francis consults with 15 Tribal Nations. Eight Tribal Nations have cultural ties to both forests in Arkansas.

Tribal Relations is in every program of the Forest Service. To build relationships with Tribal Nations we do that through language and tone of correspondence and communication. Tribal relations trainings are presented to all FS employees and assist in building these relationships by learning etiquette, protocols and other items that could build relationships with Tribes.

Recommended Changes

No recommended changes.

Part IV – Crosswalk of Plan Monitoring Indicators to Monitoring Questions

Monitoring Questions with Associated Elements and Objectives

As mentioned in Parts I and II, the Forest Plan Monitoring Program includes about 200 unique indicators to be monitored. These are included in the plan as both monitoring elements and objectives. Select elements and objectives were highlighted in this report in response to the monitoring questions addressed. A summary of these is included below with the associated questions from each topic.

A table with the complete list of monitoring program elements and objectives, including those not covered in this monitoring cycle can be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sites/nfs/files/r08/ouachita/publication/Forest%20Monitoring%20Plan.pdf>.

All the Ouachita National Forest planning documents can also be found at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r08/ouachita/planning>.

A monitoring question relating to environmental stressors is included in this report as a NFMA requirement, but monitoring elements for that topic were not included in the current Forest Plan and there are no elements or objectives for that topic to include in this crosswalk. Therefore, that topic will not be included in this Part.

Status of Select Watershed Conditions

How well are the stream and river aquatic habitat and watershed conditions being protected, enhanced, or maintained?

- OBJ14. Maintain or improve watershed health

Are watershed improvements conducted on at least 40 acres per year?

- OBJ15. Conduct watershed improvement actions on at least 40 acres per year

Have management practices maintained or improved soil productivity?

- SW001, SW002, SW003, SW004, SW005, SW006, SW007, and SW008

Is the road system being managed to protect water quality where possible?

- OBJ36 – Complete a transportation plan for the Ouachita National Forest by late 2007 that addresses the backlog of maintenance and reconstruction needs (among other things).
- OBJ37 – By 2015, identify all system roads that should be obliterated.
- OBJ38 – Obliterate 25 percent of roads identified under the previous Objective by 2015 (many such needs to obliterate roads will be identified well before 2015).
- OBJ39 – Reduce miles of road under Forest Service maintenance.

Status of Select Ecological Conditions

Are management actions improving and/or maintaining aquatic communities and habitat?

- Report any pond, lake or waterhole concerns
- Every 5 years, through the paired-stream Basin Area Stream Survey (BASS), watershed condition is to be evaluated to determine if the progress in condition ratings has occurred.
- OBJ40: Improve aquatic organism passage on an average of no less than six stream crossings per year (where there are road-related barriers to passage).

Are range allotments managed to standard and what is their progress toward desired condition?

- Number of permittees, head months, and range forage improvements

Are Forest Plan objectives being met to reduce or eliminate occurrences of non-native, invasive plant species (NNIS)?

- OBJ03. Treat at least 300 acres per year for NNIS

Status of Focal Species

Do population trends for focal species suggest a need to change forest management or monitoring plans?

- Habitat and population trends for focal species

Are management actions improving and/or maintaining habitat for focal species?

- Evaluate the effects of management on meeting public hunting demand

Status of Listed Species

Are forest management actions contributing to declines or recovery of populations of listed species?

- Habitat and (trends in) status of federally listed threatened and endangered species, and of selected sensitive and locally rare species

Visitor Use, Satisfaction, and Progress on Recreation Objectives

Are scenic integrity objectives being considered during project planning and implementation?

- Scenic Integrity Objective (SIO) areas will attain a high SIO, 65% of projects undertaken in Moderate SIO areas will attain Moderate SIO rating, and 100% of projects located in Low SIO areas will attain that rating.

Progress Toward Meeting Desired Conditions and Objectives

Is prescribed fire being utilized to restore forest communities according to the desired conditions described in the Forest Plan?

- OBJ01. Increase prescribed fire to an average of 180,000 acres per year by 2011 to help achieve and maintain desired community conditions.

Are hazardous fuels treatments being utilized to reduce risk to local communities?

- OBJ43. Complete 50,000 to 100,000 acres per year of hazardous fuel reduction in the other moderate to high priority areas (within 1/2 mile of private land with improvements).

Effects of Management Systems on Productivity

Are timber targets based on sustainable levels?

- NFMA Requirement for timber - lands are adequately restocked

Social, Economic, and Cultural Sustainability

Is timber harvest enough to continue to support the social and economic needs of the surrounding communities while remaining ecologically sustainable?

- Monitor and evaluate trends in number of acres of CCF harvested, sold, and offered.
- OBJ41. Sell an average of at least 200,000 hundred cubic feet (CCF) of timber per year.

Are there any trends in criminal behavior that reflect a change in the social, cultural, and/or economic conditions in the area?

- Report on the number of accidents, citations, acres, and type of impact of each illegal activity
- Evaluate trends in unlawful or criminal behaviors including cumulative impacts to natural/cultural resources

Are Forest Plan objectives being met for special uses?

- Permit administration
- Rights of Way (ROW)

Are Forest Plan objectives being met for heritage/tribal relations?

- Report sites managed to standard (sites inventoried, evaluated, protected, promoted, preserved, restored, rehabilitated, monitored, or enhanced)

- Report number of properties of heritage resource evaluation accomplished.
- Report number of acres of heritage resource survey accomplished.
- Report the number and types of agreements and protocols executed and the number of consultations. Every fifth year, feedback and satisfaction will be evaluated as indicators of progress toward the desired condition.

