

Breezy Hill Trail Project

Background and Project History

In the 1990s, motorized vehicle use was unrestricted on the Kisatchie National Forest. The 1999 Kisatchie Forest Plan encouraged outdoor recreation in the form of motorized trails, however, the National Travel Management Rule of 2005 required the agency to restrict motorized vehicles to designated roads and trails. In response to motorcycle enthusiasts, the Forest Service worked closely with local trail riders on a proposed 66 mile designated single-track motorcycle trail. After completing the environmental analysis and public engagement process, the forest supervisor signed the Breezy Hill Trail decision in 2006. Breezy Hill Enduro Club members volunteered time on the ground and applied for grants to assist in trail establishment. Construction began on that trail system in 2006, but was never completed and never opened to the public due to safety concerns with unexploded ordnance from the former Breezy Hill Artillery Range discovered as the project moved forward. The trail in the current proposal has been designated but construction is not complete. The total length of the trail was reduced to approximately 35 miles. For more detail on the project history and actions taken to date, please see the project timeline appended at the bottom of this document.

Current Situation

The Kisatchie National Forest is reevaluating the original Breezy Hill Trail proposal. There are new concerns with the original proposal due to public safety (parts of the trail are within the no ground penetration area of the former Breezy Hill Artillery Range). The newest proposed action would reduce the trail from five to two loops and reroute approximately 10 miles of trail. It also includes two trailheads with parking, signage and one vault toilet to be located at one trailhead. Dispersed, primitive camping is also a consideration in this proposal.

Public Engagement and the Path Forward

The agency acknowledges the Committee's concern about the project and is committed to public engagement through the NEPA process. A contract for a new environmental assessment is ready to proceed, and multiple avenues will be available for the public to provide comments on this project.

Two public meetings are planned in 2018. Sites close to the proposed trail area are being considered for these meetings. Public comments can be submitted through the forest website, social media sites, or by sending messages to a special email address set up for the proposal. Written comments may also be mailed to the Forest Supervisor's Office.

Breezy Hill Trail Project Timeline

The following timeline provides information on the history of the Breezy Hill Trail Proposal. The proposal has been reduced from 66 miles of single-track trail to 35 miles of single track trail in two loops. The proposed trail is located within the Kisatchie National Forest in Grant Parish, Louisiana. Surveys will be conducted involving an analysis on rerouted portions not previously surveyed. These surveys include plant, animal and archeological examinations. Bridge

placement hydrological data, culvert locations and stream hardening locations will also be included in the surveys.

In addition, the proposal encompasses the establishment of a main trailhead and a smaller area for overflow parking. The main trailhead amenities include a vault toilet, bulletin boards, signage, and parking space sufficient for 30 vehicles and/or trailers, fencing, a fee collection station, and other associated improvements. The parking areas will be accessed via Forest Service Road 106. No improved camping facility is proposed.

However, camping is allowed in the forest adjacent to the parking areas. Designated uses on the proposed trail are motorcycles, biking and hiking.

- 1989-2004 Single Track Enduro Special Use Events are held in Breezy Hill area.
- 1999 The Kisatchie National Forest Revised Land and Management Plan is signed which encourages outdoor recreation in the form of motorized trails.
- 2005 The contractor receives notice to complete the Environmental Assessment for the Breezy Hill Single Track Trail.
The Public engagement process begins.
- April 2006 The Breezy Hill Decision Notice is signed by Forest Supervisor Margrett Boley.
- Spring 2006 The Breezy Hill Decision Notice is appealed by the Breezy Hill Enduro Club due to the absence of a connector trail to Bankston Loop. Additionally, the club objected to the proposed seasonal closure while other motorized trails are not closed seasonally.
- Summer 2006 The Breezy Hill Decision is upheld by the Regional Forester.
- 2006-2007 The Breezy Hill Enduro Club begins volunteer efforts for trail construction activities. The Club completes approximately 23 miles of trail marker signing, clearing brush from trail, and bush hogging/mowing activities.
Additional trail groups provide work on trail layout.
Forest Service personnel conduct hydrological analysis considering bridge crossings and half culvert locations.
Funding is obligated to the Forest Service Trails Unlimited Enterprise Team to begin project design, bridge purchases, and installation.
- June 2007 Wildlife Biologists surveyed and designated Red-Cockaded Woodpecker (RCW) cluster boundaries.
- 2007-2012 Trail construction activities by Breezy Hill Enduro Club volunteers and Catahoula District recreation personnel continue with brush removal and installing trail markers, eleven low water crossings, and a bridge.
- 2009 The Army Corps of Engineers' contractors surveyed the trail area for unexploded ordnance.
- 2009 A bridge is constructed by Trails Unlimited Enterprise Team, Catahoula District recreation staff, and Breezy Hill Enduro Club volunteers.
- 2011 The Breezy Hill Enduro Club received the State Recreational Trails Grant. The Club purchased materials, supplies, and a tractor for trail construction.
- 2006-2014 Additional unexploded ordnance was found in the Breezy Hill Area in the following years: 2006, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

- 2011 The Army Corp of Engineers contracted the location and removal of Munitions and Explosives of Concern (MEC) and Material Potentially Presenting an Explosive Hazard (MPPEH) for the trails located within the no-ground-penetration area. This work continued in phases from 2011 through 2014.
- 2012 The Project Initiation Letter and the Scoping Letter requesting public comment for the trail reroutes are completed. The trail is rerouted to mitigate archeology concerns, RCW Clusters, and soil and water sensitive areas. Additionally, a portion of the trail was rerouted in response to noise concerns.
- August 2014 The Forest Service interdisciplinary team met to analyze resource survey results. Surveys and analysis continued to determine sustainability of the proposed trail system.
- June 2015 A team of District, Forest, and Regional personnel across resource areas met to introduce the PACE It! (Propose, Assemble, Convene, and Evaluate). PACE IT! is a process used to determine long-term sustainability of recreational facilities and trails. This initiative looks at the sustainability criteria and assists in setting realistic alternatives that meet management, financial, visitor satisfaction, and resource protection goals. Public safety issues concerning the northern three loops located in the unexploded ordnance area were noted. Other environmental and social concerns were identified and mitigated during the PACE IT! process.
- July 2015 Primarily for safety reasons, the Forest Leadership Team recommended constructing only the two loops located outside of the area containing unexploded ordnance.
- March 2017 Another Scoping Letter and legal notice are published. Public comments were gathered and are being analyzed.
- May 2017 Forest Leadership discussed implementing a new Environmental Assessment and Biological Evaluation and requesting additional public engagement.
- August 2017 The Forest Service entered into a contract with Gulf Engineers and Consultants for the completion of an Environmental Assessment, Biological Evaluation, and assistance with Public Input and Public Meetings for the two lower loops of the single track trail.
- Spring 2018 A new period of public engagement including two public meetings is planned. A news release will be mailed state-wide during the summer of 2018 requesting comment on the proposed action. A public inbox for email comments will be established and a physical address made available for written comments. Comments will be recorded at the public meetings. Posters requesting public comment will be placed throughout the area. A notice will be placed on the Kisatchie National Forest website requesting public comment. The public will be able to link to a comment sheet directly from the website. Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, will be used to request comments on the proposed action. The dates of these activities are to be determined in the future. The public meetings will be announced state-wide. Two sites which are in close proximity of the proposed action are being considered for the two public meetings.