

## CHAPTER 5

# IMPLEMENTATION

### 5.1. IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

The Prairie Plan provides a framework that guides the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie's day-to-day resource management operations. It is a strategic, programmatic document that does not make project-level decisions. Project-level decisions are made only after further public comment has been gathered, and the appropriate NEPA analysis is completed. The National Forest Management Act requires that resource plans and permits, contracts and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands be consistent with this Prairie Plan. Implementation is the process of using the management direction in combination with site-specific resource conditions and public input, to move towards the desired future conditions. An interdisciplinary team approach is used throughout implementation. The major steps to this process are:

- a) Selecting a mix of land areas that best provides opportunities for accomplishing the Prairie Plan management direction. Selection will involve the ecosystem(s) and their condition and landscape position.
- b) Analyzing the situation and identifying multi-resource projects that best meet the Plan direction.
- c) Prioritizing, scheduling, and budgeting the multi-resource projects.
- d) Designing the projects to best accommodate the integrated needs for all resources and values within the ecosystem.
- e) Completing the projects as designed.
- f) Protecting and managing the ecosystems and their resources while providing for public health and safety.

Subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments, occupancy and use of affected lands will be consistent with this Prairie Plan. Existing plans will be superseded or brought into compliance within two years after the approval of this Prairie Plan.

The parts of this Prairie Plan that provide management direction are:

- a) Goals and Objectives (Chapter 2)
- b) Management Areas and Prescriptions (Chapter 3 and management area map.
- c) Standards and Guidelines (Chapter 4)
- d) Monitoring and Evaluation requirements in Chapter 6

Implementation of the Prairie Plan is strongly influenced by annual budget direction and fiscal limitations. Each year the Midewin leadership team develops the annual program of work and a corresponding budget. Accomplishment of these annual programs of work will result in incremental achievement of the Prairie Plan management direction. Future budget requests will be based on the management direction outlined in this Prairie Plan, and the related projects and schedules for activities.

An initial schedule of activities is listed in Appendix F- Proposed and Probable Management Practices. This schedule will be frequently updated to keep it current. Additional proposals by other entities (such as proposals for special uses or proposals by partners) will also be considered and evaluated for compliance with all applicable direction in this Prairie Plan, as well as applicable law and other Forest Service policy and regulation. Additional guidance for implementing Plans is provided in the Forest Service Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 5).

#### **5.1.1. Decisions Made at the Prairie Plan Level**

The first level of decision involves the development of this Plan to provide direction for all resource management programs, practices, uses, and protection measures. This Plan provides broad, programmatic direction necessary to manage the resources and uses of Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in an integrated and coordinated manner. Decisions at this level may be appealed under 36 C.F.R. 217.

#### **5.1.2. Decisions Made at the Project Level**

The second decision level involves analyzing and implementing management practices and activities designed to achieve the goals and objectives of the Prairie Plan. Project decisions generally require site-specific analysis to meet NEPA requirements for decision-making, and are subject to continuing compliance with other Federal environmental laws such as the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and Clean Air Act. For example, common project-level decisions include whether or not, and in what way, a campground will be constructed, or how wetlands will be restored in a particular area. Unless they are categorically excluded from documentation, an environmental analysis document will be prepared prior to these project or site-specific decisions. Project-level planning provides an additional opportunity (beyond the development of this Plan) for public participation. Project decisions may be appealed under 36 C.F.R. §215.

The following are some examples of project-level decisions that may require additional environmental analyses and disclosure as the Prairie Plan is carried out:

- Improving wildlife habitat,
- Implementing prescribed burning,
- Improving watersheds,
- Building a campground, and
- Building roads or trails.

### **5.1.3. Operational activities exempt from NEPA**

Resource inventories, action plans and schedules do not require additional environmental analysis and disclosure at the project level.

The following are some examples of operational activities that do not constitute site-specific decisions and therefore are exempt from NEPA procedures:

- Developing five-year wildlife action plans,
- Scheduling maintenance for developed recreation sites, and
- Preparing land ownership adjustment plans.

### **5.1.4. Additional Analysis**

Additional analysis in support of Plan implementation activities may also be conducted at various scales above the project level. Doing these analyses can improve our understanding of ecosystems and associated social and economic dimensions, and can provide important context information for project planning. The need, scope and intensity of analysis will be based on issues, values and risks, public concerns and interests, presence of threatened, endangered or sensitive species, and other biological information. Such additional analysis may include herbicide use as part of an integrated pest management program; burn plans for prescribed burns; a market survey analysis; a master recreation plan; or a feasibility study for possible introduction of extirpated species such as bison, elk or other species. The Prairie Supervisor will determine which additional analyses will be conducted during the Plan implementation period.

## **5.2. PLAN AMENDMENTS**

The Plan's management direction may be amended as the need arises. A plan amendment may add, modify, or rescind one or more of the decisions of a Plan. An amendment decision must be based on the identification and consideration of issues, applicable information, and an analysis of the effects of the proposed amendment. In developing an amendment, the responsible official must provide opportunities for collaboration.

For each proposal for a Plan amendment, the responsible official must complete appropriate environmental analysis and public involvement in accordance with Forest Service NEPA procedures. A proposed amendment that may create a significant environmental effect and thus require preparation of an environmental impact statement is considered to be a significant change in the Plan. If a

proposal for amendment requires the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the responsible official must give public notice and an opportunity to comment on the Final environmental impact statement for at least 90 calendar days.

### **5.3. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

Ecosystem management and planning for the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie will never have complete or “perfect” information, but integrated planning can minimize the uncertainty by including the ability to adapt to change. Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie embraces the concept of “adaptive management.” This basically means that we will learn from experience. Two essential elements further clarify this concept: (1) a feedback element which gathers and evaluates information from current performance or an action or activity, and (2) an adjustment element which responds to feedback information by being able to alter future actions when needed.

For planning at this programmatic level, the two key aspects of adaptive management are the monitoring and evaluation process (see Chapter 6), which provides feedback on activities implemented and effectiveness of resource protection or mitigation measures, and the amendment process (described above), which allows for making necessary changes to those activities and measures. Monitoring is one source of feedback information; other sources are new scientific literature and studies, resource inventories, changes in technology, and public concerns. Monitoring at the plan and project levels will be a primary means by which prairie management techniques will be evaluated for their continued appropriateness.

The Habitat Restoration Map (Figure 3) represents the projected habitat areas or our desired future condition based upon our present knowledge. Projected habitat areas may not actually occur as outlined on the map, due to irreversible effects from previous degradation as well as inaccuracy and limitation of current knowledge. For example, past drainage modification has altered site hydrology in ways that may prevent or limit wetland restoration to sites showing wetlands as the desired habitat. Similarly, areas designated for grassland bird habitat may be eventually restored to native prairie vegetation, if and when biologists and land managers are assured the grassland bird populations will be sustained.

Additionally the trails and new roads shown on the Transportation/Trail Corridor Map (Figure 6) are not definite locations. The final trail and road locations will be made following more detailed design based on the Standards and Guidelines and other Forest Service handbook and manual direction.

#### **5.4. PLAN REVISIONS**

Revision of a Plan is required by the National Forest Management Act and must occur at least every 15 years. The revision process is a review of the overall management of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and an opportunity to consider the likely results if Prairie Plan decisions were to remain in effect.

There are eleven steps in initiating the revision process:

1. Provide opportunities for collaboration
2. Summarize issues determined to be appropriate for consideration
3. Develop information and analysis relating to ecological, social and economic sustainability
4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the current Prairie Plan in contributing to sustainability
5. Identify new proposals for special areas or special designations
6. Identify specific watersheds in need of protective or restorative measures
7. Identify lands classified as not suitable for timber production (all of Midewin's lands are classed as not suitable for timber production)
8. Identify and evaluate Inventoried Roadless Areas and unroaded areas (Midewin has no Inventoried Roadless Areas or unroaded areas).
9. Develop an estimate of outcomes anticipated for a 15-year period if the plan decisions in effect at the time the revision began were to remain in effect
10. Provide public notice of the revision process and allow for public review of information developed in response to steps 1-9 above
11. Based upon the information compiled in the above steps and any comments received during the comment period in step 10, publish a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to add, modify, remove or continue in effect the decisions embodied in a plan

The responsible official must give the public notice and an opportunity to comment on the Final environmental impact statement for at least 90 calendar days. Following public comment, the responsible official must oversee preparation of a final environmental impact statement in accordance with Forest Service NEPA procedures.

The revision process is completed when the responsible official signs a record of decision for a plan revision.

#### **5.5. Integration with Forest Service Directives System**

Management direction in the Forest Service Directive System, including the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and the Forest Service Handbook (FSH), is part of this plan management direction and is not repeated in the Prairie Plan.

Management direction also includes applicable laws, regulations and policies, although they may not be restated in this Plan.

### 5.6. Hierarchy of Management Direction

Direction for management of National Forest System lands comes from a variety of levels. National and Regional direction includes laws, executive orders, regulations, Forest Service policy, and the Regional Guide.

The following chart illustrates the hierarchy of management direction beginning with National and Regional direction at the highest level and ending with site-specific, project-level direction when the Plan is implemented.

