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Mark Twain
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Region 9



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SCOPING REPORT

Pine Fuel Reduction Project

Project Number: 10402
Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger Districts
Mark Twain National Forest
Barry, Taney, Ozark, Howell and Douglas Counties, Missouri

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I. INTRODUCTION

This scoping report summarizes a proposal to develop the Pine Fuel Reduction Project. The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments on the proposal.

This project began as a Forest-wide initiative at the Forest Supervisor's Office in 2001. A scoping letter was sent to interested publics on September 28, 2001 to solicit comments on a fuel reduction project similar to this proposal. However, many of the adjacent landowner and locally interested publics weren't contacted about the proposed project. This scoping report is being mailed to locally interested and affected parties to help identify any additional issue and concerns.

II. LOCATION

This project will encompass fifty-one pine stands, totaling 1,311 acres across the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District. Please refer to Table 1 and the attached maps for details.

III. BACKGROUND

During 2000, more than twice the 10-year national average of wildfires burned 6.8 million acres of public and private land throughout the country. The magnitude of the fires is attributed to weather conditions (drought and wind) and the long-term affect of aggressively suppressing wildfires, which allowed brush and small trees to build up in the forests.

The overall need for fuel reduction as an effective means to reduce wildfire occurrence is demonstrated in numerous studies, including one completed by the USFS Strategic Overview of Large Fire Costs Team. The team was assembled to outline recommendations for fire management policies and direction for the program after large, catastrophic fires. According to the team, elevated fuel levels in forests make effective and efficient fire fighting extremely difficult and dangerous. The recommendations were developed to address the threat of safety to both communities and firefighters. Among the team's recommendations:

- Tier fire management to Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMP) and use prescribed fire as an equal resource management tool
- Implement an aggressive fuel management program

An August 2000, Presidential directive required the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to develop a response to severe wildland fires, reduce fire impacts on rural communities, and ensure effective future firefighting capacity. This resulted in the development of the Congressionally-supported National Fire Plan (NFP). The FY 2001 Appropriations Act supporting the NFP, among other things, listed Urban Wildland Communities Within the Vicinity of Federal Lands That Are High Risk From Wildfire. This list is to be used to identify priority areas that would benefit from hazardous fuel reduction treatments. This list includes 84 communities within Missouri, eighty-eight percent of which are within the Mark Twain National Forest (MTNF) boundary. Communities at risk from wildfires that are adjacent to Federal lands administered by Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District include Blue Buck, Bradleyville, Chadwick, Garrison, Hilda, Keltner, Kimberling City, Lampe, Longrun, McClurg, Rueter, Shell Knob, Siloam Springs and Sparta.

In addition, Congress also directed the United States Departments of Interior and Agriculture to work with governors to develop a national 10-year Comprehensive Strategy to deal with wildland fire and hazardous fuels situation. This strategy identified prioritizing hazardous fuels reduction where the negative impacts of wildland fire are the greatest as one of its major goals. The strategy acknowledges the importance of fire suppression, but indicates the need for a shift in fire management emphasis from a reactive approach to a proactive approach. The focus is on hazardous fuels reduction, integrated vegetation management, and fire-fighting strategies (USDOI & USDA 2001).

Studies indicate that extensive areas within the MTNF are classified Fire Condition Class 2, and to a lesser amount, Condition Class 3. The “condition class” is a risk descriptor associated with alteration of fire regimes. Condition Class 2 develops when one or more fire intervals are missed (often as a result of fire suppression efforts) and the understory vegetation becomes denser. The accumulated understory tends to burn more intensely, increasing the difficulty in suppressing a fire and resulting in a more pronounced impact on biodiversity, soil productivity, and water quality.

In Condition Class 3, fires are relatively high risk and the fire intensity is more severe, impacting large trees that normally would survive fires of lower intensity. This condition class is high risk based on the danger posed to people and the potential for long-term resource damage.

Many dense pine stands scattered across the MTNF consist of 30- to 60-year-old, overcrowded stands where tree canopies interconnect. Trees in these conditions tend to be weakened by the competition for available growing space and become more susceptible to disease, insects, wildfire, and drought. Many of these stands are characterized by overcrowding and by weakened, dying, or dead trees that provide elevated fuel loads for wildfires. The current fuel types, loading, and density on the selected project stands are conducive to stand replacing fires. Stand replacing fires are wildfires that burn intensely under adverse weather conditions and in accumulated fuels, thereby fundamentally changing the vegetative composition of the ecosystem, destroying communities and/or habitat, or entire stands.

IV. PURPOSE AND NEED AND THE PROPOSED ACTION

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire across the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District by reducing the load and disrupting the continuity of fuel in stands identified as dense pine woodlands. In this situation, “catastrophic” is defined as substantial damage from wildfire to existing vegetation and developments. Wildfire is considered an unplanned fire that burns organic soil, grasses and forbs, shrubs, trees, and associated fuels in the natural or modified state.

The LRMP identifies a number of multiple-use and resource management goals that are achieved by implementing the plan. The LRMP Fire Management Goals include:

- Identify a cost-efficient response to fire prevention and suppression based on objectives for the management area and the values that are at risk.
- Implement prescribed fire as a tool to meet resource management objectives.

As part of the direction for fire management, the LRMP states, “... fuels management will be planned based on an analysis of probable fire location, expected fire intensities, potential net resource value change, and risk to health and safety, and will be addressed in the development of management area action plans.”

The Pine Fuels Reduction Project proposes to meet this purpose by thinning dense pine stands to: interrupt the fuel continuity, increase crown spacing, or both; reduce the available long-term fuel loads; and maintain stand health to delay tree mortality induced by crowding.

Proposed Actions

The following pine stands on Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District have been identified for mechanical thinning based on high fuel loads, crown fire risk and threats to private property. Additional mechanical treatments may be conducted after the initial thinning to reduce fuel loading from downed woody debris.

Table 1: Pine Stand proposed for Mechanical Thinning

Unit	Location	Management Area	Compartment	Stand	Acres
Ava	T. 24 N., R. 15 W., Sec. 6	3.4	30	94	79
Ava	T. 24 N., R. 15 W., Sec. 6	3.4	30	97	10
Ava	T. 24 N., R. 15 W., Sec. 6	3.4	30	133	19
Ava	T. 24 N., R. 15 W., Sec. 6	3.4	30	135	18
Ava	T. 23 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 4	6.2	32	34	13
Ava	T. 23 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 4	6.2	32	35	24
Ava	T. 23 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 10	6.2	32	55	43
Ava	T. 23 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 10	6.2	32	60	30
Ava	T. 23 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 10 & 11	6.2	32	61	17
Ava	T. 23 N., R. 16 W., Sec. 10, 11 & 15	6.2	32	66	22
Ava	T. 24 N., R. 17 W., Sec. 29	6.2	35	22	7
Ava	T. 24 N., R. 17 W., Sec. 29	6.2	35	24	56
Ava Total					338
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 3	3.4	203	68	39
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 2	3.4	203	23	7
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 3	3.4	203	70	30
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 2	3.4	203	61	12
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 10	3.4	203	115	17
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 35 & 34	3.4	213	24	64
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 35	3.4	213	26	36
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 35	3.4	213	27	14
Cassville	T. 23 N., R. 25 W., Sec 35 & 2	3.4	213	37	32
Cassville Total					251
Willow Springs	T. 24 N., R. 10 W., Sec. 17 & 18	3.4	135	42	32
Willow Springs	T. 27 N., R. 11 W., Sec. 3	4.1	100	28	46
Willow Springs	T. 27 N., R. 10 W., Sec 5 & 8	4.1	101	31	19
Willow Springs	T. 27 N., R. 10 W., Sec 16	4.1	101	101	11

Unit	Location	Management Area	Compartment	Stand	Acres
Willow Springs	T. 27 N., R. 11 W., Sec 9 & 10	4.1	105	11	10
Willow Springs	T. 27 N., R. 11 W., Sec 10	4.1	105	15	10
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 11 W., Sec 10 & 11	4.1	112	120	19
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 24	4.1	121	14	30
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 28	4.1	121	26	40
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 35	4.1	121	57	12
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 35	4.1	121	56	16
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 34	4.1	121	46	19
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 34	4.1	121	44	32
Willow Springs	T. 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 34	4.1	121	45	22
Willow Springs	T. 25 & 26 N., R. 10 W., Sec 2 & 35	4.1	121	60	35
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 1 & 2	4.1	121	61	47
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 1	4.1	121	65	54
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 2	4.1	121	71	14
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 20	4.1	129	94	2
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 20	4.1	129	97	7
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 20 & 29	4.1	129	136	16
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 20 & 29	4.1	129	135	13
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 30 & 29	4.1	133	3	26
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 32	4.1	133	47	21
Willow Springs	T. 25 N., R. 10 W., Sec 31	4.1	133	67	28
Willow Springs	T. 24 N., R. 11 W., Sec 4	6.1	138	19	51
Willow Springs	T. 24 N., R. 11 W., Sec 9	6.1	138	89	27
Willow Springs	T. 24 N., R. 11 W., Sec 8 & 9	6.1	138	94	32
Willow Springs	T. 24 N., R. 11 W., Sec 29	6.1	140	61	21
Willow Springs	T. 24 N., R. 11 W., Sec 29	6.1	140	73	10
Willow Springs Total					722

V. DECISION TO BE MADE

The District Ranger of the Ava/Cassville/Willow Springs Ranger District is the official responsible for making a decision for this project. The decision to be made from this analysis is whether or not to implement the project as proposed or an alternative, based on the ability of the alternative chosen to effectively reduce the fuel loads in an environmentally and fiscally responsible manner and in response to issues and concerns generated internally or by the general public. The analysis will compare the alternatives and potential environmental impacts and the ability to limit impacts associated with future catastrophic wildfires by reducing the current fuel loading. Based on the

analysis, the Deciding Official must decide whether or not to proceed with a specific action. If an action alternative is selected, the decision may include mitigation measures in addition to the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.

The decision is not one of land allocation, nor is the analysis intended to look at every possible combination of activities. The scope of the decision will be confined to a reasonable range of alternatives that will meet the project purpose and need.

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional Information concerning the hazard fuel reduction and the National Fire Plan can be found on the following Websites:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/>

<http://www.fireplan.gov/content/home/>

