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Public Safety is First Priority for Ozark-St. Francis National Forests

Individuals driving through the Ozark Mountains this spring are likely to see a lot of changes. Contractors hired by the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests have been working to remove dead and dying red oak trees in the road rights of way. The focus of this activity is to remove the hazard of dead trees falling across the road causing traffic problems and possibly injuring motorists.

“The dead and dying trees are falling at an alarming rate,” stated Forest Supervisor Charles Richmond. “We have stepped up our efforts to get these trees down. At present we have 239 miles of roads where the dead trees in the road rights of way have been marked for cutting.”

Contractors have been hired to cut and leave the trees along state highways, while timber companies have purchased the dead trees along less traveled routes where equipment could be operated without causing safety hazards.

“I am concerned with how all the downed trees look along the roadways,” said Richmond, “the visual impacts will gradually diminish as firewood cutters remove the wood, the wood decays, and summer vegetation covers the down material.”

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Firewood permits will be available for purchase at Ranger District offices located in Hector, Jasper, Clarksville, Ozark or Marianna where the hazardous tree removal work has been completed. Free firewood permits may be available for a few specific areas, which would also be available from one of those District offices.

Public safety is a key component of the oak mortality action plan developed by the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests. This plan outlines several important aspects for dealing with the oak mortality issue, including public awareness, assessing the damage, exploring different management strategies focused on restoration, and research.

“If you see trees down or brushy areas along roadways please keep in mind that the areas will soon recover,” stated Oak Sustainability Coordinator Len Bollman. “The purpose of the work is to increase safety now and enhance scenery in the future.” To expedite the process of removing the hazardous trees along roadways within the forest, contractors were permitted to leave the tops and limbs of the trees behind.

The dead and dying trees in the Ozark National Forest can be attributed to the increased oak mortality problem in Arkansas and some surrounding states. Several reasons for the unusually high oak mortality rate include: old age (70+ years) shallow and rocky soils, years of severe drought, and an infestation of native Red Oak Borers.

Visit us online for more information about oak mortality and the Red Oak Borer at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark/resources/oakmortality.html>

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