

DECISION MEMO
Goosetown Salvage Project

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region, Hoosier National Forest
Tell City Ranger District
Perry County, Indiana
(T 6 S, R 2 W)

I. DECISION

A. Description of Decision

My decision is to pursue salvage of weakened and severely damaged standing trees and downed and uprooted trees on approximately 80 acres of hardwood and pine stands in the Goosetown Ridge area (Please see attached map). On May 8, 2003, a tornado struck this area and severely damaged trees on 35 acres of the proposed 80-acre salvage area. The remaining acreage received scattered damage.

The following defines the different damage conditions that would be salvaged:

- **Downed** trees are those whose main stem is less than six feet from the ground.
- **Uprooted** trees are those with more than 20 percent of the root system exposed to the air.
- **Weakened** trees are those with signs of partial root upheaval, twisted stems, broken tops, or excessive lean.
- **Severely damaged** trees are those having broken stems, 50 percent or more of the live branches broken, or the appearance of having suffered whipping or stress.

No healthy trees would be cut except to reduce safety risks or provide access for salvage operations. Trees to be removed will be determined by physical inspection and would be individually marked. No new roads would be constructed as access to the damaged trees would use existing roads.

The German Ridge Trail, used by hikers, mountain bikers, and horseback riders, runs through the eastern portion of the area. This decision will also reduce the risk to these users by removing the damaged and weakened trees that pose a safety hazard along the trail system in the project area.

After salvage is complete, the area would be burned using an appropriate burn prescription. This would reduce the fire hazard to National Forest System land and the adjacent private land. It would also prevent insect and disease damage by removing the down woody material that would serve as breeding area for insects. Maple, beech, and pine competition would be decreased, allowing oak and hickory to grow. More oaks and hickories would provide more hard mast for wildlife. In order to take advantage of existing fire breaks, such as streams and roads, the burned area would be approximately 160 acres, as shown on the attached map. This would minimize soil disturbance compared to having to construct interior fire lines and allow for a more manageable landscape burn.

The burn boss would determine the actual area to be burned during the days leading up to the burn. It would be slightly less than the area shown. Three to five years after the initial burn, the same area would be burned again, further reducing the beech and maple competition and releasing the slower growing oak and hickory.

An existing abandoned roadbed in the Helwig Hollow portion of the blowdown would be rehabilitated. The Hoosier National Forest (the Forest) would construct a series of ephemeral shallow-water wetlands paralleling the creek in and around the existing entrenched and eroded roadbed. We would accomplish this by deepening the roadbed where necessary and installing a series of earthen check dams that would seasonally retain water. This series of wetlands would also serve to control runoff and sediment delivery to the adjacent creek. In addition, it would provide a greater diversity of insects for the Indiana bat, other bats, birds, and seasonal habitat for amphibians.

Mitigation measures: Mitigation measures include:

1. No standing shagbark or shellbark hickory trees will be removed.
2. If possible, at least 3 live trees per acre (20" or larger) and 6 trees per acre (11" or larger) of the following species will be left on site. If there are no trees >20" to leave, then 16 of the largest trees below will be left on site if possible. Trees may be girdled to allow for snags along the edges of the harvest area.
 - shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*)
 - shellbark hickory (*Carya laciniosa*)
 - bitternut hickory (*Carya cordiformis*)
 - silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*)
 - green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*)
 - white ash (*Fraxinus Americana*)
 - eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
 - northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*)
 - post oak (*Quercus stallata*)
 - slippery elm (*Ulmus rubra*)
 - American elm (*Ulmus Americana*)
 - Black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*)
3. Cutting standing trees will be restricted to **September 16th to April 14th**. Other salvage operations may continue outside of this period.
4. Damaged trees, particularly those containing cavities or those species likely to provide suitable roosts for bats, will be retained along edges of the blowdown area.
5. Standing mature hardwood trees, of suitable type and where protected by adjoining trees, will be girdled to provide additional future roosts for tree roosting bats, among them the Indiana bat.
6. Within all harvest areas, all snags will be retained unless they pose a safety problem or must be removed for access.
7. If active raptor nests are found during marking or harvest operations, District Wildlife Biologists will be notified and appropriate protection zones will be identified around the nest.
8. In order to reduce the spread of invasive species, logging equipment will be washed before entering and before leaving the project area.
9. If invasive species (as listed on the Hoosier National Forest Invasive Species List) are found in the project area, they may be mechanically treated on a case-by-case basis after being evaluated by the Forest Botanist.
10. Main skid roads will be located to minimize the spread of invasive species.
11. Conduct prescribed burns in early spring before April 15.
12. Scatter tops and limbs of harvested trees on the forest floor to provide woody debris and substrate for detritivores that may serve as a prey base for bats.

B. Purpose of Decision

The salvage operation and burning of this area complies with the Hoosier National Forest *Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan)* Forest-Wide Guidance on page 2-6, which states that vegetation management may also be employed to restore native plant and animal communities and ecosystems.

The project is in Management Area 2.8, which is general forestland. My decision is inline with the management direction for this area. (Forest Plan 2-31). Management area 2.8 has the following pertinent guidance:

- The area is general forest land with the appearance of large areas of old forests with scattered openings. There is ample evidence of human activities, but most blend in well with the natural environment. Interaction among visitors is frequent. (Forest Plan 2-31)
- Habitat in these areas is best suited to animals that use a mosaic of different-aged hardwoods forests. This management area allows for more early successional habitat than in most other areas of the Forest. (Forest Plan 2-31)
- Viewing scenery, hunting, fishing, gathering forest products, and hiking are key recreation activities. Some of the areas are landlocked by private lands, but most are generally accessible by foot trails and state and county roads. (Forest Plan 2-31)
- Following a natural catastrophe where the damage is too wide spread for group selection, clearcutting may be used on a site specific basis (Forest Plan 2-34)

II. REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE DECISION

Decisions may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment when they are within one of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1 or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances.

A. **Category of Exclusion**

The salvage proposed in this project is within the category of exclusion FSH 1909.15 section 31.2 (13) "Salvage of Dead and Dying Trees." The rehabilitation of the road along Helwig Hollow and the prescribed burn are within the category of exclusion FSH 1909.15 section 31.2 (6) "Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities." These categories are listed in FSH 1990.15 Chapter 30.

B. **Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances**

1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat –

Wildlife Biologist Clark McCreedy found no T&E species or their habitat in the project area. It was determined that this decision will have 'no effect' on listed species or their critical habitats (McCreedy 2004).

2. Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670) –

Manual direction requires analysis of potential impacts to sensitive species, those species for which the Regional Forester has identified. On February 29, 2000, the Regional Forester approved the sensitive species list. This list was last updated on October 20, 2003. Potential effects of this decision on sensitive species have been analyzed and documented in a Biological Evaluation (McCreedy 2004). This decision will have no effect on sensitive species.

3. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds –

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 requires Federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as, "the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood-prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any one year."

The project is not located in or near floodplains. This was validated by a review of maps. This decision will not affect floodplains. To further minimize floodplain-related impacts, we will implement the *Forest Plan* guidance in Appendix J and K.

Wetlands: Executive Order 11990 requires Federal agencies to avoid adverse impacts associated with destruction or modification of wetlands. Wetlands are defined by this order as, "... areas inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and under normal circumstances does or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction."

The project is not located in or near wetlands. This was validated by reviewing maps and the site. This decision will not affect wetlands.

Municipal Watersheds: Municipal watersheds are managed under multiple use prescriptions in forest plans. This decision will not affect municipal watersheds. There are two municipal watershed(s) on the Forest. One is Patoka Reservoir and the other is Monroe Reservoir. The project area is not in either of these watersheds. This was validated by map. This decision will not affect municipal watersheds.

4. Congressionally Designated Areas –

There are no congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, national recreation areas, or wild and scenic rivers in the project area.

Wilderness: This decision does not affect Wilderness. The project is not in or near Wilderness. Wilderness is identified on the HNF as Management Area 5.1 (Forest Plan, p. 2-36). The project is located in Management Area 2.8 (Forest Plan, p. 2-31). The closest Wilderness, Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area, is greater than 50 miles north of the project. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect the Wilderness Area.

Wilderness Study Areas: There are no Wilderness Study Areas on the Forest (Forest Plan FEIS, p. 2-39). This decision will not affect wilderness study areas.

National Recreation Areas: There are no National Recreation Areas on the Forest. This decision will not affect National Recreation Areas.

Wild and Scenic Rivers : There are no Wild and Scenic rivers on the forest. There will be no impact on wild and scenic rivers.

5. Inventoried Roadless Areas –

There are no Inventoried Roadless Areas in the project area (Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation, FEIS Volume 2 – Maps of Inventoried Roadless Areas, p79. Mogan Ridge has an Inventoried Roadless area of 8,000 acres. It is not affected by this project and is located approximately 8 miles northeast of the project area.

6. Research Natural Areas –

There are no Research Natural Areas in the decision area (Forest Plan FEIS, p.2-26). The closest Research Natural Area, Pioneer Mothers Research Natural Area, is over 30 miles northeast of the project. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of activity, will not affect Research Natural Areas.

7. Native American Religious or Cultural Sites, Archaeological Sites, or Historic Properties or Areas –

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires federal agencies to take into account the effect of a project on any district, site, building, structure, or object that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in the National Register. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act also requires federal agencies to afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment. The Archaeological Resources Protection Act covers the discovery and protection of historic properties (prehistoric and historic) that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It affords lawful protection of archaeological resources and sites that are on public and Indian lands. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act covers the discovery and protection of Native American human remains and objects that are excavated or discovered in federal lands. It encourages avoidance of archaeological sites that contain burials or portions of sites that contain graves through “in situ” preservation, but may encompass other actions to preserve these remains and items. This decision complies with the cited Acts. The area has been surveyed and no significant historic or prehistoric resources are located in these areas. (Krieger 2003)

No other extraordinary circumstances were identified.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Initial public involvement for the project included a direct mailing (December 2, 2003), and listing in the Forest's *Hoosier Quarterly* since November, 2003. A letter was sent to 270 individuals and groups from the Tell City Ranger District interested Party list and adjacent property owners. After the road rehabilitation was added to the project, it was necessary to re-scope the project. A letter detailing the proposal was sent to 277 individuals. This included the original mailing plus those who had commented on the project, but did not get the first mailing.

In total, comments were received from 13 individuals . These comments have been used to refine the project and analysis and to explore the possibility of extraordinary circumstances and potential effects to those resources.

Comments received have been tracked in detail in a separate document in the planning record (Planning Record document N). Tracking included identifying those comments: beyond the scope of this decision; addressed by Forest Plan direction; addressed through project refinement; addressed through consideration of environmental effects of the project, refinement of the project, and/or alternatives to the project. Comments identified as beyond the scope of this decision were dismissed from further consideration. Comments identified as addressed by Forest Plan direction have been noted as part of the decision. Comments identified as addressed through consideration of environmental effects of the project, refinement of the project, and/or alternatives to the project have been noted in making the determination that there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant environmental effect.

Comments ranged from support of the project to many different concerns about salvaging timber and burning on National Forest System lands. The comments and the responses to them are summarized in Planning Record document N.

IV. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY AND/OR RELATED TO OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

My decision will comply with all applicable laws and regulations. I have summarized some pertinent ones below.

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) - This act requires the development of long-range land and resource management plans (Forest Plans). The Regional Forester approved the Hoosier Forest Plan in September 1985 as required by this act. Since then, we amended the Plan seven times. The amended plan provides for guidance for all natural resource management activities on the Forest. The act requires consistency between projects and activities and the *Forest Plan*. We reviewed the *Forest Plan* in consideration of this project. This decision is responsive to guiding direction contained in the Plan, as summarized in Section I of this document.

Vegetation Manipulation (National Forest Management Act) - This Act and its implementing regulations require that vegetation manipulation of tree cover for any purpose must comply with the following seven requirements found at 36 CFR 219.27(b).

- *Be best suited to the goals in the Forest Plan.* The applicable goals are stated in the Section I of this document. This decision is responsive to those goals and is best suited to meet those goals.
- *Assure that technology and knowledge exists to adequately restock lands within five years after final harvest.* The knowledge and technology currently exists to adequately restock the treated areas (Thake 2004)
- *Not be chosen primarily because they give the greatest dollar return or the greatest output of timber (although these factors shall be considered).* This decision was based on a variety of reasons. It was not primarily chosen for its expected dollar return. Economics was only one of the many factors considered.
- *Be chosen after considering potential effects on residual trees and adjacent stands.* The effects on residual trees and adjacent stands have been considered (Thake 2004). The overall direction and Standards and Guidelines contained in the Forest Plan are designed to provide the desired effects of management practices on the resource values. This decision is consistent with the Forest Plan and provides the desired effect on residual trees and adjacent stands .
- *Be selected to avoid permanent impairment of site productivity and to ensure conservation of soil and water resources.* This decision avoids impairment of site productivity. The nature of the project and use of Best Management Practices will protect soil and water resources.
- *Be selected to provide the desired effects on water quality and quantity, wildlife and fish habitat, regeneration of desired tree species, forage production, recreation users, aesthetic values, and other resource yields.* This decision provides the desired effect on the above resources. The overall direction, standards, and guidelines contained in the *Forest Plan* are designed to provide the desired effects of

management practices on the resource values. This decision is consistent with the *Forest Plan* and provides the desired effect on the above resources.

- *Be practical in terms of transportation and harvesting requirements and total costs of preparation, logging, and administration.* The project area is adequately roaded: Less than ½ of a mile of temporary road is necessary to carry out this decision. The treatment in this decision is appropriate to accomplish project objectives, and is economically practical.

Endangered Species Act - See Section II, Item B1 of this document.

Sensitive Species (Forest Service Manual 2670) - This manual direction requires analysis of potential impacts to sensitive species, those species for which the Regional Forester has identified population viability is a concern. There will be no impact to Sensitive Species (McCreedy 2004).

Clean Water Act - This act relates to restoring and maintaining the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this act with Forest Plan guidance (p. 2-7, Forest Plan Appendices J and K) and Best Management Practices. This decision incorporates Best Management Practices to ensure protection of soil and water resources. The latest February 1998 edition of the *Forestry Best Management Practices Field Guide* (BMP) is on file at both Tell City and Bedford offices. Additionally, the project does not affect rivers or streams although some erosion that is currently occurring in Helwig Hollow would be eliminated by the rehabilitation of the old roadbed.

Wetlands (Executive Order 11990) - See Section II, Item B2 of this document.

Floodplains (Executive Order 11988) - See Section II, Item B2 of this document.

Federal Cave Resources Protection Act - This act requires Federal agencies to secure, protect, preserve, and maintain significant caves, to the extent practical. Site features and field review substantiate that no caves are in the decision area. No known cave resources will be affected by this decision. Subsequently identified caves will be protected (*Forest Plan* p.2-10 to 2-11).

National Historic Preservation Act - See Section II, Item B6 of this document.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act - See Section II, Item B6 of this document.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act - See Section II, Item B6 of this document.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898) - This Order requires consideration of whether projects would disproportionately impact minority or low-income populations. This decision complies with this Act. Public involvement occurred for this project, the results of which I have considered in this decision-making. Public involvement did not identify any adversely impacted local minority or low-income populations. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minority or low-income populations.

National Environmental Policy Act – This act requires public involvement and disclosure of potential environmental effects. The entirety of documentation for this decision supports compliance with this act.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12 (f): Decisions for actions that have been categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in FSH 1909.15, Section 31.1 and 31.2.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

This decision may be implemented as soon as this memo is signed.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Chris Thornton at the Tell City Ranger District (Address: 248 15th Street, Tell City, IN 47586; Voice: 812-547-7051; TTY/TDD: (hearing impaired); Fax: 812-546-6144).

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision on the Goosetown Salvage Project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment. Because it is within two of the categories identified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 7 CFR part 1b.3 or one of the categories identified by the Chief of the Forest Service in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 sections 31.1 or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances present. My conclusion is based on information presented in this document and the entirety of the Planning Record.

/s/ *James E. Denoncour*
James E. Denoncour
District Ranger

Date September 21, 2004

REFERENCES CITED

Division of Forestry, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Publication, 1998. Logging and Forestry BMP's for Water Quality in Indiana. 85. p.

Krieger, Angie. 2003 Goosetown Ridge Tornado Blowdown [memo concerning heritage resources] Project file, Hoosier National Forest, Bedford IN, 1p

McCreedy, Clark. Biological Evaluation Goosetown Salvage Harvest Project. Project file, Hoosier National Forest, Bedford IN, 101p

Thake, Thomas. 2004 Silvicultural Prescription Goosetown Salvage. Project file, Hoosier National Forest, Bedford, IN. 3p

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