

DECISION MEMO
Reforestation Tree Planting

USDA Forest Service, Eastern Region, Hoosier National Forest
Brownstown Ranger District
Orange County

I. DECISION

A. Description of Decision

The Hoosier National Forest will prepare and plant 42 acres on the Brownstown Ranger District in the spring of 2004. The scoping letter mailed on October 9, 2003 listed 59 acres to be planted. The acreage was reduced to avoid cultural resource sites in the area. The area being planted is an old field in the Wesley Chapel Gulf area around what is called Elrod Gulf. The objective is to reforest this area with a variety of native tree species and increase the species diversity of the area. The project is located in T2N, R1W section 9, and is displayed on the attached maps.

As part of the machine planting, the heavy fescue sod layer will be broken up around the seedlings for a distance of three inches on either side of the seedling. The machine planting will use a farm tractor, and a small plow will plow away the sod layer to a depth of approximately 3-4 inches. The breaking up of the sod layer will help the seedlings survive by reducing competition with the seedlings and allowing more available moisture to the seedlings. Breaking up the heavy sod and herbaceous layer will:

- reduce the grass competition,
- make moisture more available to the seedlings,
- make planting easier, and
- improve tree seedling survival.

The species of tree seedlings proposed for planting were selected to match the given soil and topographic location, value to wildlife, and ability to survive and grow well. The species may include white oak, chinkapin oak, white ash, sweetgum, chestnut oak, dogwood, redbud, and a shrub species - ninebark.

B. Purpose of Decision

The proposed work is consistent with guidance in the April 1991 Hoosier National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment (as amended). Through this action, young hardwood stands will provide important habitat for some species of wildlife.

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 31.1b or 31.2 and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect.

A. Category of Exclusion

This project is within the category of exclusion FSH 1909.15, sec 31.2(5) Regeneration of an area to native tree species, a category identified as having no significant impacts on the environmental resources, unless there are extraordinary circumstances present that indicate a potential for such effects.

B. Relationship to Extraordinary Circumstances

There are resource conditions that must be considered in determining whether a proposed action warrants further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. According to Forest Service Interim Directive 1909.15-2002-2, "It is the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist."

1. Threatened and Endangered Species or Their Critical Habitat –

The Endangered Species Act requires that Federal activities do not jeopardize the continued existence of any species Federally listed or proposed as threatened or endangered, or result in adverse modification to such species' designated critical habitat. In accordance with Section 7(c) of this act, a list of the listed and proposed, threatened or endangered species that may be present in the project area was requested from the U.S. fish and Wildlife Service (U.S.D.A., Forest Service - Update No. 1, 1995). The information indicated that there is no critical habitat within the decision area. As required by this act, potential effects of this decision on listed species have been analyzed and documented in a biological evaluation (Basile 2004). There are no threatened, endangered, or proposed species on the project sites. It was determined that this decision will have 'no effect' on listed species or their critical habitats.

2. Floodplains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds -

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 directs 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 floodprone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any one year." There are no floodplains in the project area (Merchant 2004).

Wetlands: Executive order 11990 directs agencies to avoid adverse impacts through 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 or vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. There are no wetlands in the project areas as determined by review of topographic maps and field visits (Merchant 2004 and Thake 2004).

Municipal Watersheds: Municipal watersheds are designated by Congress, and managed under multiple-use prescriptions in forest plans. This areas is not in a municipal watersheds (U.S.D.A., Forest Service - FEIS, p. 9-28)(U.S.D.A. Forest Service - DEIS, p. 3-11).

3. Congressionally Designated Areas -

Wilderness:

This decision does not affect Wilderness. The project is not in or near Wilderness. The closest Wilderness, the Charles C. Deam Wilderness Area, is over 55 miles away from any of the planting sites. 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 (U.S.D.A. Forest Service - FEIS, p. 2-7). 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.

4. Inventoried Roadless Areas –

There are no inventoried roadless areas (RARE II) in the decision area. The nearest inventoried roadless area, (Mogan Ridge Area) is 36 miles away. The Mogan Ridge Wild Turkey Management Area (7,000 acres) was inventoried as meeting the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (Rare II) criteria in the June 8, 1978 amendment to the inventory list (Federal Register, Volume 43, pp.22876-24881). The planting is localized and will not affect the physical character of the roadless area.

5. Research Natural Areas -

There are no Research Natural Areas in the decision area (U.S.D.A. Forest Service - FEIS, p. 2-49). The closest Research Natural Area, Pioneer Mothers Research Natural Area, is six miles south of the planting site. This decision, with impacts limited to the immediate area of the activity, will not affect Research Natural Areas.

6. American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.

7. Archaeological Sites, or historic properties or areas

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires Federal agencies to consider 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. Other applicable laws include the Archaeological Resources Protection Act and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. This decision complies with the cited acts and will have no effect on historic properties. Surveys were conducted for Native American religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas that may be affected by this decision (Krieger 2004). A 'no properties affected' determination was made. The Forest consulted with the State Historic Preservation Office concerning this finding.

No other extraordinary circumstances related to the project were identified.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Notice of this project and requests for comments were sent to 175 interested parties on October 9, 2003. Property owners potentially affected by this decision were contacted for their input. The planting was also mentioned in the November 2003 and February 2004 issues of the Hoosier Quarterly. Four letters were received from the public. All four letters supported the planting, but one letter wanted herbicides

used prior to planting to enhance seedling survival. We recognize that using herbicides would improve the seedling growth and survival, but we have chosen not to use herbicides and instead will plant seedlings at a higher rate, knowing that survival will not be as high without herbicides. We currently plant at a rate of 800 seedlings per acre and expect a 60 to 70 percent survival rate, which would provide adequate stocking for the planting to be considered successful.

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

Forest Plan Consistency (National Forest Management Act) - This act requires the development of long-range land and resource management plans (Forest Plans). The Hoosier Forest Plan was approved in September 1985 as required by this act. It has since been amended seven times. The amended plan provides for guidance for all natural resource management activities on the Forest. The act requires all projects and activities be consistent with the *Forest Plan*. The *Forest Plan* has been reviewed in consideration of this project. This decision is responsive to guiding direction contained in the Plan, as summarized in Section I of this document. This decision is consistent with the standards and guidelines contained in the *Forest Plan*.

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. This decision is aimed at reforesting fields back to a forest condition with a diverse mixture of species. This is not a harvest prescription, and we currently have the technology to reforest these areas using quality planting stock. The purpose of this treatment is to reforest these areas with a mixture of tree species. Over the past several years we have planted several lowland and upland planting sites which contained heavy fescue. First year survival has been between 60 and 70 percent.

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. This decision was made after review of adjacent stands, and it was determined that these fields were not needed in the forest openings program and the best use for these stands would be to plant them and provide for early successional tree composition with a wide variety of species (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.
- This decision will not impair site productivity, and the planting of trees will ensure conservation of 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 fields. 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 the above resources.

- This project is adequately roaded, and no new temporary or system roads are necessary to implement this decision.

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

Regional Forester 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 Regional Forester Sensitive Species (Basile 2004).

Clean Water Act - This act directs Federal agencies to aid in restoring and maintaining the integrity of waters. The Forest Service complies with this act through the use of Best Management Practices and direction in Appendix K of the *Forest Plan*. This decision incorporates Best Management Practices to ensure protection of soil and water resources. The project does not affect rivers or streams.

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 is intended 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 (Basile 2004). Subsequently identified caves will be protected.

National Historic Preservation Act - See Section II, Item B7 of this document.

Archaeological Resources Protection Act - See Section II, Item B7 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 minorities or low-income populations. This decision is not expected to adversely impact minorities or low income populations.

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

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215 because it is an activity categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement according to 36 CFR 215.12(f).

VI. IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.10(c), this decision may occur immediately. Implementation is expected to begin this spring.

VII. CONTACT PERSON

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Tom Thake at the Tell City Ranger District (248 15th Street, Tell City, IN. 47586; Voice: (812)547-7051; TTY/TDD: (812)547-6144 (hearing impaired); Fax: (812)547-6144, email: tthake@fs.fed.us).

VIII. SIGNATURE AND DATE

I have concluded that this decision may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment as it is 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 31.1b or 31.2, and there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the decision that may result in a significant individual or cumulative environmental effect. 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

3/12/04
Date

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's target center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-w, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964 (voice or TDD).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Literature Cited

- Krieger, Angie. 2004. Letters dated December 17 and January 14, 2004 to Tom Thake, tree planting areas. On file with: Forest Supervisor, Hoosier National Forest, 811 Constitution Ave., Bedford IN. 8 p.
- Merchant, Pat. 2004. Memo dated January 30, 2004 to Tom Thake, tree planting areas. On file with: Forest Supervisor, Hoosier National Forest, 811 Constitution Ave., Bedford IN. 3 p.
- Basile, Cindy. 2004. Biological Evaluation dated February 8 and 9, 2004 to project file, effects of tree planting on endangered, threatened, and regional sensitive species. On file with: Forest Supervisor, Hoosier National Forest, 811 Constitution Ave., Bedford IN. 22 p.
- Basile, Cindy. 2004. Part of Biological Evaluation, Federally Threatened and Endangered Species, dated February 8, 2004, karst review for 2004 planting areas. On file with: Forest Supervisor, Hoosier National Forest, 811 Constitution Ave., Bedford IN. 7 p.
- Thake, Thomas. 2004. Stand prescriptions. On file with: Forest Supervisor, Hoosier National Forest, 811 Constitution Ave., Bedford IN. 3 p.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1991. Land and Resource Management Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Hoosier National Forest. 177 p.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1990. Land and Resource Management Plan, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Hoosier National Forest. 294 p.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1995. Land and Resource Management Plan, Administrative Update No. 1, Hoosier National Forest. 12 p.