



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mark Twain National Forest
Houston – Rolla – Cedar Creek
Ranger District

108 S. Sam Houston Blvd.
Houston, Missouri 65483
(417) 967-4194 TTY (417) 967-9947
FAX (417) 967-2524

File Code: 1950

Date: March 1, 2004

Friends, Neighbors and Interested Parties

The Mark Twain National Forest is proposing forest management activities on Forest Service Lands administered by the Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District. These management activities will be covered in a project named Houston/Rolla Pine Fuel Reduction Project.

This letter and request for comments is the initial stage (Scoping) of public involvement for this project. This project was originally scoped as part of a forest-wide proposal, and is being redeveloped as a district-level project in order to work more effectively with landowners that are adjacent to the project areas. You are being notified because you are an adjacent landowner to the project, or, you are on the Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District mailing list.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire damage across the Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District by reducing the fuel loads and disrupting the continuity of fuel in stands identified as dense pine woodlands.

Many dense pine stands scattered across the district 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 habitats, or entire stands.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Houston/Rolla Pine Fuels Reduction Project proposes to meet this purpose by using combinations of pine thinning and low to moderate intensity prescribed burning to:

- interrupt the fuel continuity,
- increase crown spacing,
- reduce the available long-term fuel loads



- maintain stand health to delay tree mortality induced by crowding.

The proposed actions consist of

- thinning approximately 2,731 acres,
- thinning and burning approximately 376 acres, and
- fire-line construction and maintenance.

Burns may be repeated as needed on a 3-5 year rotation to reduce fuel build-up and keep the area in a desired condition.

DECISION TO BE MADE

Public scoping (initial planning stage) will occur on projects that can be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA). After we receive comments from interested persons, agencies, and groups, our interdisciplinary team will meet again to consider any new information and issues raised during the scoping period. If during our initial planning stage indicates that extraordinary circumstances are present and it is uncertain that the proposed action may have a significant effect on the environment, an EA will be prepared. If no extraordinary circumstances are impacted or affected by the action, a Decision Memo will be prepared to cover this work.

HOW TO COMMENT

We invite you to comment on this proposal before we complete the analysis and make a final decision. Substantive comments are most useful and are those comments that are within the scope of the proposed action, are specific to the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action and include supporting reasons for me, the responsible official, to consider. Therefore we ask that your comments be as site specific as possible. Enclosed with this letter you will find a comment form for you to fill out and send to the address listed on the form.

If additional site specific information is desired on this project, it may be obtained in a number of ways:

- Telephone: Contact, Mark Hamel at the Houston Ranger District Office during business hours (8:00a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CST) at 417-967-4194.
- In writing: Contact, Houston/Rolla/Cedar Creek Ranger District, 108 S. Sam Houston Blvd., Houston, Missouri 65483. Attention: Mark Hamel.
- Facsimile requests: Address to: Mark Hamel, NEPA Coordinator at 417-967-2524.
- E-mail requests: mailroom_r9_mark_twain@fs.fed.us

Please Specify Houston-NEPA- Houston/Rolla Pine Fuels Reduction Project on your subject line.

- Web site viewing: View vicinity map, project maps, and this Letter at: www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/projects/project.htm. Scroll down to Houston/Rolla Pine Fuels Reduction Project.

Please submit your written input to the Houston office by April 5, 2004. When submitting comments, be sure to include your name, current physical mailing address, title of the proposed action and signature or other verification of identity upon request.

If you have any questions about the proposal or our analysis process, please contact the Houston District Office at the number above. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

s/John C. Bisbee
JOHN C. BISBEE
District Ranger

Enclosures:
Vicinity map
Project map package
Comment response form